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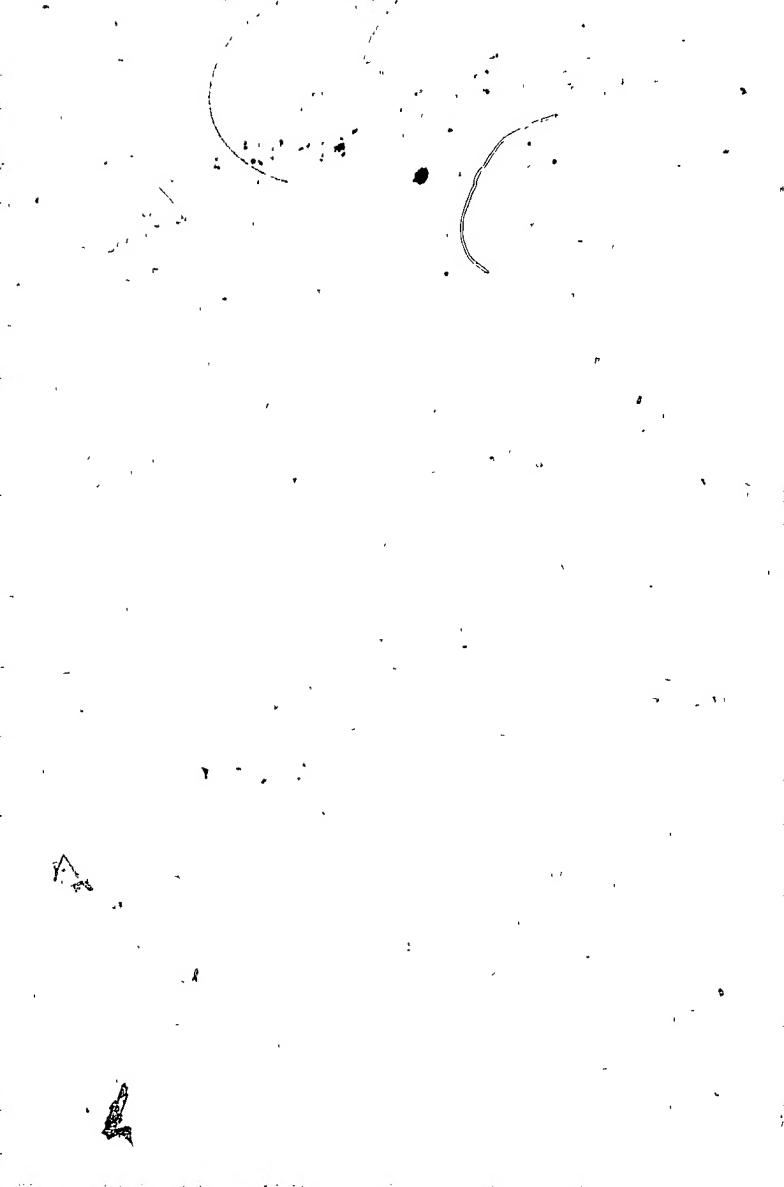
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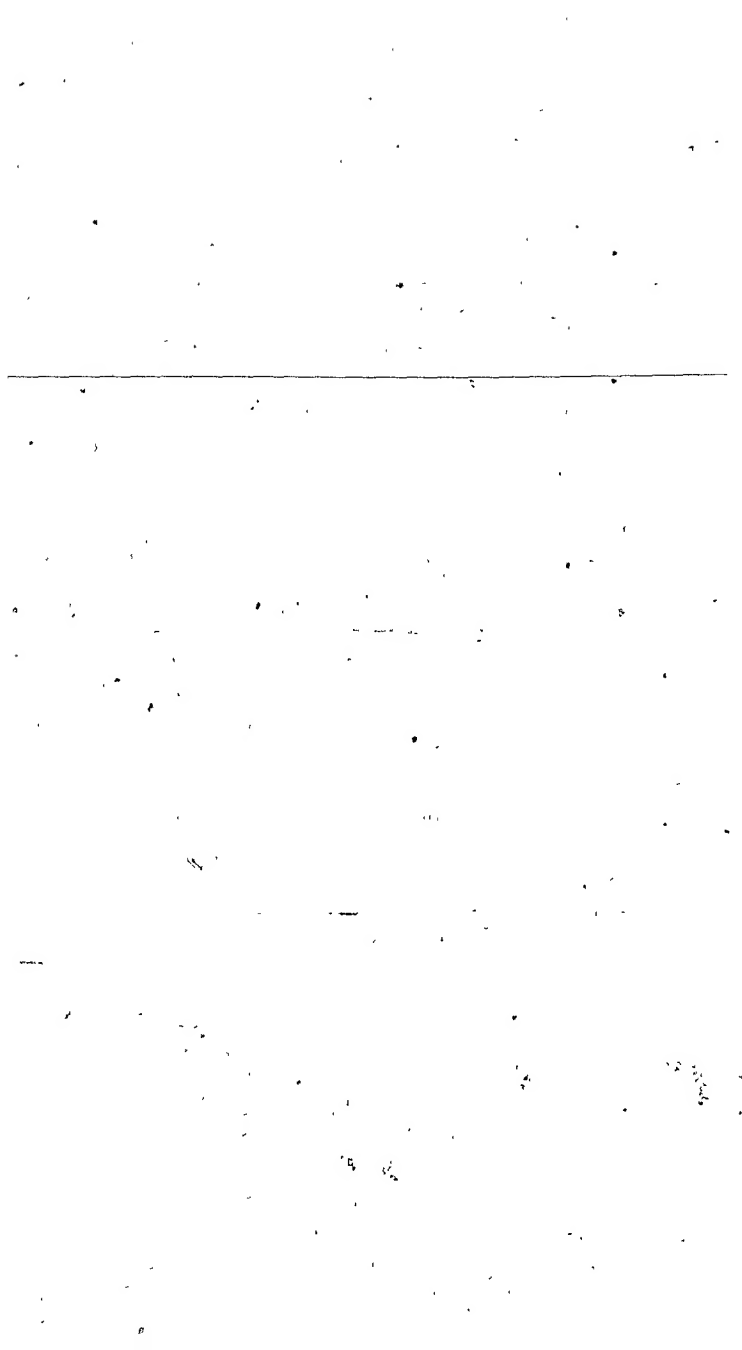


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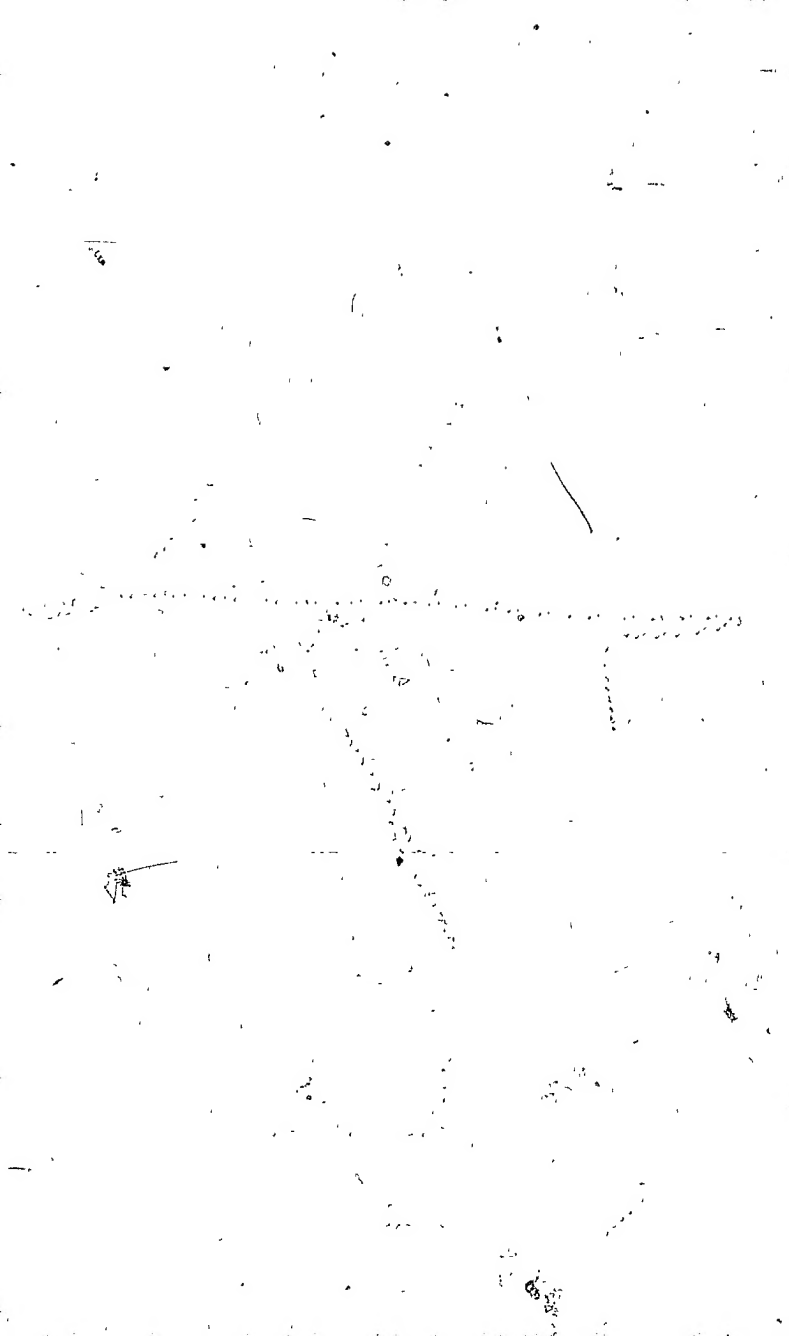
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# JOHN KERR

JOHN KERR, 1871-1941



# JOHN KERR

*By*

CONSTANCE KERR SISSONS

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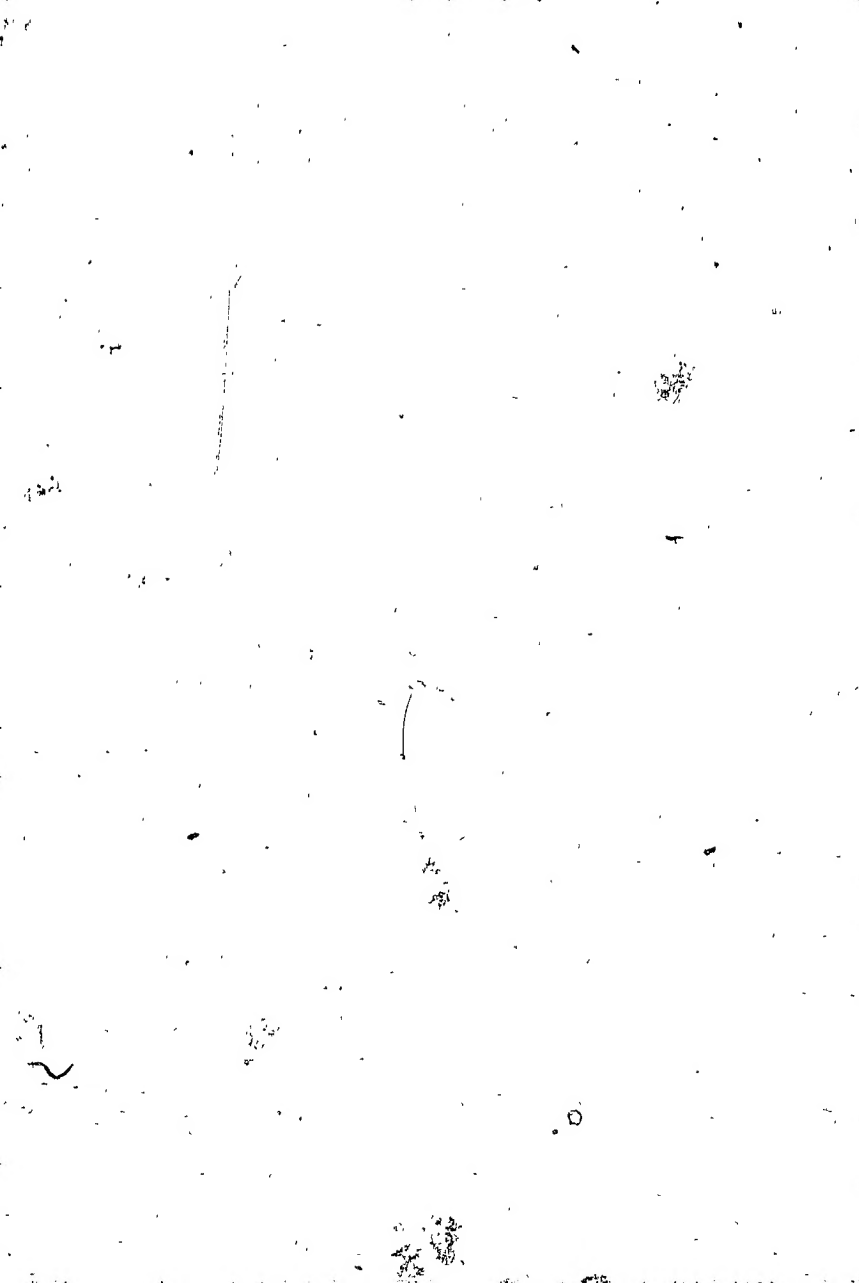
TO THE DEAR MEMORY OF

MY FATHER

WILLIAM HENRY CORRY KERR (1837-1891)

JOHN A. KERR'S FAVOURITE BROTHER





# CONTENTS

## CHAPTER

## PAGE

### SECTION I THE VOLUNTEER

I. ADVENTURERS ALL	3
II. PERTH IN PERSPECTIVE	7
III. A PRINCE AS NEMESIS	15
IV. OFF TO RED RIVER	21
V. POTS AND PORTAGES	32
VI. LINGERING ON THE RAINY	41
VII. FEATURING FORT GARRY	52
VIII. A FENIAN FIASCO	65
IX. POLICING UNDER DE PLAINVAL	71

### SECTION II HUNTER AND ADVENTURER

X. WITH GABRIEL DUMONT	85
XI. "BEATEN BY A SQUAW!"	93
XII. A STARVING CREE	103
XIII. THREE MEN OF NOTE	113
XIV. GAMBLING FOR A WIFE	120
XV. THE ROAD TO GREEN LAKE	126
XVI. A NIGHT STAMPEDE	133
XVII. THE TIN WHISTLE	139
XVIII. A BLACKFOOT-CREE WEDDING	146
XIX. CHIEF BIG BEAR AND THE BISON	152

XX. FIVE CREES—MISSING!	162
XXI. RETURN FROM THE PLAINS	169

## SECTION III

## TRADER AND INTERPRETER

XXII. THE ARREST OF LÉPINE	181
XXIII. A TRADING TRIP TO THE FAR WEST	193
XXIV. WINTER 1874-5	202
XXV. FRESH FIELDS AND PASTURES NEW	212
XXVI. LAKE SUPERIOR BOILS OVER	219
XXVII. THE INDIAN TREATIES OF 1876	228
XXVIII. WESTERN KALEIDOSCOPE	244

## SECTION IV

## THE VETERAN

XXIX. "COMPARATIVELY DRAB"	255
XXX. OLD AGE AND AUTHORSHIP	260
XXXI. LORD TWEEDSMUIR SENDS A GREETING	278

## ILLUSTRATIONS

JOHN KERR'S PARENTS  
THE BICYCLE PICTURE  
WINNIPEG IN 1869  
JOHN KERR 1929

TO FACE PAGE

6

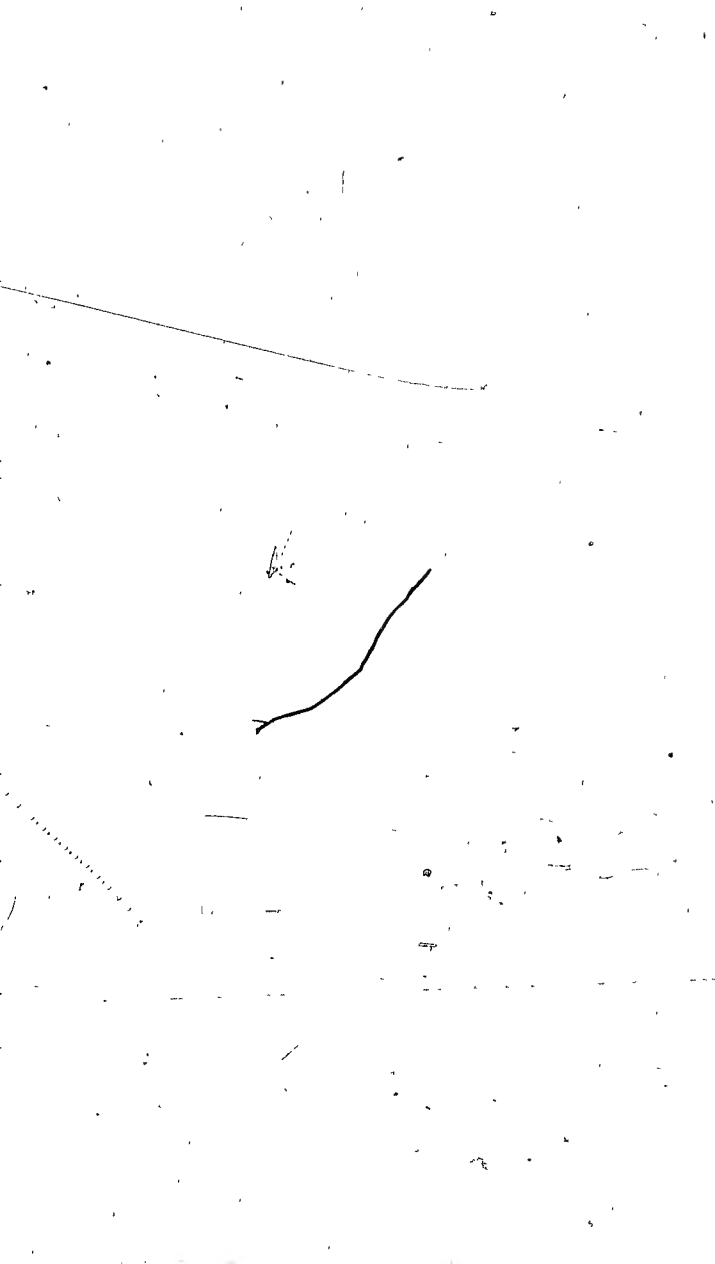
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260



JOHN KERR



**SECTION I**  
**THE VOLUNTEER**





## CHAPTER I

### ADVENTURERS ALL

EVERY snapping twig made music for a twelve-year-old lad as he pushed into the forest beyond the borders of the town. The night was moonless and still after a day of Indian summer heat, and the boy, lightly clad for autumn weather, carried no blanket, no provisions but the heel of a loaf wrapped in coarse paper, and no implement but his penknife. Employing his sense of touch, rather than his sight, the runaway edged into a cubby-hole that he had fashioned of evergreens in the densest thicket of the wood, and threw himself upon a bed of fallen leaves with a sigh of content. He had evaded the parental eye with complete success, stealing away from home at so late an hour that no one could miss him till morning, and not then if he had luck in slipping up to his bedroom before the house was astir.

Peace to his Latin Grammar, and to the dog's-eared arithmetic work-book! For this one thrilling night he was not John Andrew Kerr of the town of Perth, Lanark County, Upper Canada; he was Hugo the Hunter, a character he had himself evolved after a fervid study of various yellow-backed booklets of a sensational type.

In common with many lads of 1863, John had conned his spelling-lessons between enraptured, forbidden, candle-

lit glimpses into Beadle's Dime Novels, a series of romances of the Daniel Boone order that poured from the printing presses by the thousand. Hugo the Hunter, modelled upon one of the Beadle heroes, was "an accomplished scout, an intrepid explorer, a sturdy *voyageur*. There was little about woodcraft, wild Indians, caches, trails and tomahawks, that Hugo did not know. His present habitat held no resemblance to the bush-lots of Lanark County. It was a hidden lodge in that vast region of the far North-West, where scarcely a white man had yet set foot. "Hugo", munching his crust of bread, noted how the dim outlines of distant treetops resembled the feathered head-dresses of Indian braves.

Sleep refused to visit him, and three hours later the Hunter was numb with cold. Gone was Indian summer; and the mercury, as Canadian mercury can, had sunk with sly obduracy, five, ten, fifteen, perhaps twenty degrees. The weather had simply moved in from Hugo's favourite haunts to the actual scene of this adventure. His bed of crisp leaves stung like icicles, and the frozen hero stumbled out into the open to rouse his circulation by exploration.

In the dim light a town took shape—not Perth, but an Indian village replete with wigwams and tepees. Here was a "cave" where a hunter might rest—between the outer and inner doors of a shop. But the stone flags were cold, cold, and Hugo limped on in another direction. To him an adventure, however ill-starred, was an adventure still—the "fort" in which, after scaling a ladder, he presently took refuge, emitted the pungent odour of stored hay. There was warmth towards the centre of the stack in which he thankfully burrowed. As he knelt there, to his amaze-

ment he heard himself whispering, "Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray Thee, Lord, my soul to keep". Even in his spent condition he realized that this was no custom among Beadle heroes. Apparently he was reverting to the past character of John Andrew Kerr, a drowsy schoolboy prodigal, glad to rest with the animals in his father's barn.

The transit from barn to bedroom was cleverly carried out after the back-door was unlocked by someone who disappeared around the corner of the house. George and Catharine Kerr, surveying their flock about the breakfast table, had no inkling of John's nocturnal excursion. They were of pioneer Irish stock. George, who had made an amazing record by obtaining his diploma at Apothecaries' Hall in Dublin at the age of thirteen, had been assisting his uncle, a doctor in Drogheda, with a medical career in view, when his father decided in 1830 to emigrate to Canada. George was then sixteen, the oldest of eight children. Dawson Kerr, but twenty years his son's senior, was daring and resourceful. Nancy Kennedy, George's mother, had been a beauty in her girlhood. Eight years her husband's senior, she lacked his constitutional strength, though able to enter into his enthusiasms.

The family set forth courageously from the old home in Aughnamullin, and settled at first in Lachute, Lower Canada, where Dawson, assisted by George, taught school for a short time. They then moved to Perth, Upper Canada, where Dawson Kerr opened a general store, gardened on a large scale, raised poultry, and even set up a homely hand-loom—for weaving was a skill he had learned in his native land. The products of his industry met a steady sale, both locally and in the countryside, and all his grand-

children, but especially John, enjoyed the sight of their grandfather at his loom, his swift, steady fingers timed to the smooth motions of his feet.

Early in 1863 death parted this pioneer couple, Dawson surviving Nancy for twenty-one years, a strong, upstanding, industrious citizen of Perth. He lived to be ninety and to see a large company of his descendants.

George Kerr was a man of uncommon abilities with an experimental turn of mind. Mere living was venture enough for a lad who married at nineteen and brought ten children into a necessitous world. His bride was Catharine Corry, who had come out from Enniskillen, Ireland, with her younger sister, Sarah, at about the time the Kerr family settled in Lachute, and had established a successful dress-making business in Perth. Many were the tales Catharine told of the adventures of her father, Sergeant-Major William H. Corry of the Enniskillen Dragoons. John Andrew gathered that his maternal grandfather had been "a brave man of almost gigantic proportions". Certainly, whatever he had of initiative seems to have descended to his two young orphaned daughters, who had the pluck to try their fortunes in the New World.

John Andrew Kerr was the eighth child in a family of seven boys and three girls. —By 1863 only five of his brothers and sisters were still at the Perth homestead. John envied those who had gone out into the world: the scene of his parents' matrimonial venture, new as towns go, was old to him, old and staid and sadly humdrum.



JOHN KERR'S PARENTS

GEORGE KERR

CATHERINE CORRY KERR



## CHAPTER II

### PERTH IN PERSPECTIVE

**A**CTUALLY there was no lack of romance in the history of Perth: indeed no settlement in Upper Canada had a more picturesque inception. At the close of the war of 1812, hundreds of disbanded soldiers, including many officers of famous regiments, located in Lanark County. Belgians and Germans among the soldiery had fought under Napoleon, and, after capture by the British, had accepted—as an alternative to prison confinement—the job of taking arms against the Americans. Most of these who settled in the Ottawa valley eventually moved to the United States. The military influx of 1816 was augmented by a band of Scottish immigrants, seven hundred strong, who, by May of that year, had changed the name of the Pike River to the Tay, and had christened the village, Perth.

Owing to the origin of its earliest settlers, Perth managed to import many formalities and graces into the wilderness. It was at a gay entertainment in the old Red House there, one August evening of 1819, that disaster overtook the newly-arrived Governor, the Duke of Richmond. The banquet in his honour at the officers' mess was suddenly interrupted. His Excellency showed symptoms of hydrophobia from which he died a few days later, on the floor of a settler's hut.



Perth continued to be the scene of brilliant revelries, and more than one *affaire d'honneur*. Its people have kept alive the story of the Lyon-Wilson duel, perhaps the last to be fought on Canadian soil. The victim, Robert Lyon, was well-known to George Kerr, who composed the tribute carved upon the memorial stone.

The first Lanark election to the Legislative Assembly took place in 1820. But it was not until 1832 that a lively prosperity visited the infant community. This followed upon the construction of the Rideau canal. Connecting with the main waterway, some eight miles distant, a link had been built which stimulated the economic life of Perth, made it a depot for supplies, and encouraged settlement. In January 1851, the month of John Kerr's birth, Perth became "a village with town powers". Exactly three years later it emerged as a full-fledged town.

John's recorded recollections opened with the last day of the year 1855, when he was not quite five years of age. He had begged to be allowed to accompany the older members of the family to Watchnight service in the Methodist Chapel. His parents, formerly members of the Protestant Episcopal Church of Ireland, had left the Church of England in Perth to become devout Wesleyans. John had already fought a torturing tendency to sleep during the sermon, by following the injunctions of his sister Sarah, who told him that, if he kept turning one thumb around the other, he would, *in time*, make an orange! "Sunday after Sunday," he declares, "I twiddled those thumbs, but never an orange materialized." However, John's dawning love of adventure caught at this new idea:

Church in the middle of the night! The mysterious notion thrilled me with a sense of curiosity. After a nap my enthusiasm wilted, but, having put my hand to the plough, I wasn't permitted to turn back. So I washed my face in cold water, donned coat, cap, mittens and muffler, and set out with the rest. During the walk of three-quarters of a mile, I had to run ahead several times to warm my blood in the near-zero atmosphere; and glad we all were to join the circle around one of the four big red-hot stoves in the chapel, before we marched—a goodly family we were—up the aisle to our square pew.

Even to me that service was impressive. I caught the drift of it—a spiritual stock-taking of the dying year. Many an “Amen!”, many a stifled sob, punctuated the fervent pleas for forgiveness. When drowsiness overtook me, a pinch on the leg set me broad awake to gaze upon the big gilt-framed clock that hung on the gallery-front. Its steady tick-tock was audible as the congregation knelt in silent prayer. I could read the time. In a frenzy of excitement I noted that the hands were within two minutes of midnight.

Now at last I was awake at the magic hour! I quivered in the hope of some strange apparition. Had a great angel with golden wings floated from the gilt circle enclosing that clock-face, I would not have been in the least surprised! So, when the stroke of twelve brought only fervent amens, my hopes were cruelly dashed. My father “raised” the tune of Wesley’s old hymn: *Come let us anew, Our journey pursue*, a short prayer followed, the benediction was pronounced, and the hand-shaking began. Amid jingling of sleighbells and last goodbyes, the congregation bravely met the sharp air of that first hour of 1856.

From his earliest years, the town smithy enchanted John. It was on a summer day in 1858 that, a little, black-haired

boy of seven, he made his first call there. Hearing the ring of hammer on anvil, he swung past his schoolmates who were fishing in the Tay and darted down a side street to the blacksmith's shop. There, in utter fascination, he watched a lump of iron and a small "bit" of steel being turned into an axehead. The smith and his helper shaped, tempered and sharpened the object with a rhythmic-precision that delighted John, and his curiosity was aroused by the fact that the big grindstone whirled steadily without the action of any visible power. When he found that it was set in motion by a horse treading a tanbark ring in an adjoining shed, he was filled with concern for the animal. But when, on making advances to the horse, he discovered that it was blind, he was so overwhelmed with pity that he lost all interest in the blacksmith's craft and brooded over the creature's subjugation. A horse should be strong and free. This beast had not even the freedom of a cart-horse—and it was blind!

It was John's first glimpse of the woe that is bound up with reality, and in his absorption he failed to note the passage of time. When he finally went home to confide in his mother, he was confounded by the fact that day was waning, and the cows still at pasture, when he should have had them herded safely into the barnyard. He knew what his mercurial Irish mother would say—and do!—about that.

On subsequent visits to the smithy, however, John became convinced that the horse was not unhappy. He took it gifts of food, and forgot its infirmity while he watched the smith and his helper fashioning their implements of steel. They had a reputation to sustain, for lumberjacks

from bordering shanties proclaimed Korry's axes as the finest in the whole district.

As he grew older he was invited to strike a few blows on the glowing iron and the smithy became a favourite resort, as potent in his education as the school.

Horses were one of the twin loves of John's life; the other was music—particularly vocal music. Perth in the fifties offered more scope for the enjoyment of this latter predilection than might have appeared possible. The singing-master was a factor in community life, and John's record includes a vivid account of his activities:

Edward Andrews was a deeply-religious man who sometimes acted as lay preacher. Driving a trusty nag, he made a circuit of neighbouring villages and organized singing-classes of from fifty to one hundred. The fee of two dollars from each pupil and the proceeds of his closing concerts were all the income he enjoyed. He carefully graded us into groups, and lent his own beautiful voice in the task of instruction. The result was an appreciation of true melody which accompanied us into old age.

When I was a lad of eight or so I sang a solo under his direction. I had the star part in a performance representing the coster street-cries of old England. After recovering from stage fright I sang fairly well and I also stood up nobly under the subsequent ragging of my schoolmates, when black eyes and bloody noses were exchanged.

I can never forget the master's dramatic end. He had taken charge of a service in that same little old Methodist Chapel, every part of which I recollect as if I had seen it yesterday, from the doors of the square family pews to the reflectors behind the flaring tallow candles on the walls—yes, and the tin pails that caught the black liquid seeping

---

through the long lengths of stovepipe. I see it all again as I recall the old man's passing.

He gave out his favourite hymn, *Jesus, Lover of my Soul*, singing the first stanza alone in his usual clear strong voice. The next two were sung by the congregation, the final verse by the old chap himself. In the last line, just as he voiced the words, "Rise to all eternity", he fell forward in the pulpit, his arms upon the Bible, and before anyone could reach him, he was dead.

It was on February 7th, 1859, that Perth was linked by rail with the outside world. Exactly two weeks earlier John Kerr had attained the age of eight years, and the bitterly cold weather that marked the incoming of the first train could not dismay a healthy Canadian boy who was proudly "going on nine". Perth struggled into its warmest wraps to uphold its Mayor, John Deacon, whose happy duty it was to accord a reception to the long-awaited locomotive.

As trains go, it hadn't much distinction. It had taken nearly ten hours to cover the distance of less than forty miles from Brockville, and the wood-burning engine had brought in its wake only two small coaches—but how it enraptured John, how it spelt adventure, freedom, escape, speed, power, the lure of foreign parts!

Extreme cold had snapped the couplings, and heavy cord had been used to link the cars to the locomotive, as John's quick eye discerned, but the monster appeared none the less imposing on that account. Nothing in all his subsequent adventures gave him a greater thrill. So excited was he inspecting the locomotive at close quarters, that when the engine-driver blew a blast upon the whistle, John

fell head-first into a ditch and had to be extricated, just as if he were still a seven-year-old.

One of the old grammar schools of Upper Canada was located at Perth, and many names now associated with the history of the Dominion were entered in its ancient registers. School discipline up to, and beyond, the middle of the nineteenth century, was of the severest type. John has traced his progress on the stony road of learning in a few pithy sentences:

At an early age I was taken to the Perth Public School and handed over to the tender mercies—and the “tawse”—of the principal thereof, a bully and tyrant, if ever there was one. During my sojourn at the public and grammar schools, I passed through the hands (and when I say “hands”, I mean *hands*, not only in a literary, but in a literal sense) of some dozen teachers. Heavy hands they were, most of them! But for sheer ruthlessness, the principal of the Perth Public School in the fifties and part of the sixties, easily headed the list. And, believe me, in that seat of learning, at that period, tender-hearted guides were sadly in the minority.

There was seldom any use complaining at home, for the Spartan parents of that era offered scant sympathy, but, being of rather tough fibre, I took my doses without whimpering. While not exactly in the dunces' class, I showed more proficiency in school sports than in my studies.

Actually John has underrated his abilities. Elsewhere, his notes show that he deeply appreciated the plays of Shakespeare as declaimed by the older scholars, and that his mind was fairly well stocked with mathematics and the classics. Perth schools had as much to offer as others in the

province, but tuition at that date concerned itself little with life and its problems, and John's intelligence was of a type irked by confinement, and struggling continually for outward expression.

### CHAPTER III

## A PRINCE AS NEMESIS

**F**IFTY-ONE years after the founding of Perth, the Canadian provinces were federated, and all over the newly-united Canada celebrations marked that first Dominion Day in July, 1867. John Kerr was now a tall youth of sixteen, lively and muscular. His formal education was languishing to an unlamented end, and before him lay the future as yet uncharted.

His imagination still played upon heroic themes. He saw himself astride a rearing horse, tackling a band of redskins. In fancy he polished off several painted savages, securing as trophies their bows and arrows, their feathered headgear, their Indian ponies. His dark eyes wore an absent look as he visualized these triumphs, and the tree-bordered streets of Perth gave place to his dream of the open prairie.

Changes had taken place at the smithy since those faraway days of 1858. Long since, the blind horse had trotted into the happy hunting grounds. The smith himself had, years before, been appointed Chief Constable for the town, and his helper, Neil Campbell, had eventually opened a smithy on his own account near John's home. The demand for axes lessened as logging cleared most of the adjacent forest land. The shanties were moved



farther and farther back, till lumbering ceased to be one of the town's major industries. The picturesque riverman, with his long pike pole and spiked boots disappeared, and venturesome town lads no longer rode big logs down the river.

Still attracted by hammer and anvil, John seems to have been *persona grata* to the smith. At it the two of them would go, crack-bang, crack-bang, filling the need of John's powerful muscles for violent exercise. One day he told Neil Campbell of his yearning to get to Red River and hunt the lordly buffalo. Red River was destined to become a part of Canada, so everybody said. . . .

"If you're going there, you'll need a strong hunting-knife," the smith volunteered. "I'll make you a fine one, see if I don't!"

He was as good as his word. A week later he handed John a knife, fashioned like a dagger, with a razor-sharp, pointed blade, and a handle neatly bound with brass wire. Delightedly, John marched off to the saddler's and had a stout leather sheath made for it. Less than three years later, that knife was in a kit travelling westward, when the dream of its owner came true.

Meanwhile, it was John's task to find a trade or some suitable occupation. In those early days there were more jobs than there were job-seekers, and always room at the top for the enterprising. John, at seventeen, entered the employ of the local photographer. There was probably something alluring and adventurous in this calling at that date, for photography was scarcely beyond its infancy. In the year of John's birth, 1851, it first attained practical form, and its immense popularity, while it had the charm





THE BICYCLE PICTURE

of novelty, encouraged many improvements in technique. As late as 1857 exposures of over ten minutes were sometimes necessary, but by 1865 this trying period had been materially reduced.

Apparently our fledgling camera-man responded with some enthusiasm to his opportunities in the Perth gallery, for at eighteen he went to fill an opening in the famous Notman studio at Montreal. While still in Perth, however, he took a picture of himself in Irish costume, seated on the bicycle upon which he had won a race. Among his effects there was found a note describing the process:

*Modus Operandi of the Bicycle Picture*

I placed the camera in position, getting a proper focus. Then I hung the black velvet cloth, with a long string attached to it, over the mouth, pulled up the exposure cover, got on my bicycle, and jerked the string attached to the cloth. Then when I judged the time of exposure was sufficient, I jumped off the wheel and shoved down the negative cover. In those days exposure lasted from fifteen seconds up, according to the sunlight. Sometimes twenty or twenty-five seconds, or even more. Not instantaneous as now. And it was mighty hard to keep one's features and eyes steady for so long a time.

The scene now changes to Montreal. A photograph of a handsome, moody young man, his face set off by the circular fringe of beard affected at that date, bears the famous Notman imprint. The youth is seated on a lounge that is swathed in buffalo robes; his hat has been tossed upon the fur, and he is holding a slender cane; carved table-legs project from the velvet flounces of a drape, and upon this smothered table, a statuette companions an inkwell

from which a quill pen protrudes, these in turn being backed by a stiff silk portière. Shrinking in fright under the drapery is a spaniel (trust John to have a dog!). On the back of this work of art are the initials "J.A.K.". Nearly seventy years later John Andrew appended the words "1869, at 18 years".

This portrait deserves a detailed description only because it is a perfect epitome of what was now John's stock-in-trade. He was being initiated into the art of arranging the composite backgrounds deemed essential to "likenesses" of seventy years ago. Apparently he was making progress in this accomplishment and in the delicate matter of handling photographic plates, when fate stepped in and changed the whole course of his life. Nemesis overtook him in the shape of a lad just a few months his senior—and a Prince at that!

In August of this year, Prince Arthur, later the Duke of Connaught, third son of Queen Victoria, a fine upstanding youth with a character described as "independent", made his first visit to Canada. It was felt that his presence might spread a little oil on the somewhat uneasy waters of the period. Fenianism, which had created uncertainty (varied occasionally by violence) during the whole of that decade, was by no means completely scotched. Montreal was selected as Prince Arthur's headquarters, and trips were arranged to other cities and centres of interest. His visit was to last for almost a year, and he not only participated in winter sports and performed a number of princely acts of an official nature, but he had a chance to deal personally with the Fenians, who thoughtfully staged an uprising. For his services he received a medal and clasp.

On October 13th, according to his biographer, Prince Arthur left for a trip up the Ottawa River. But before that day he had visited the famous photographic salon in Montreal. John recounts some details of this visit in a letter to his father, dated October 11th, 1869. Incidentally this missive reveals some of the current procedures in this line of work.

Dear Papa,

... I am getting along very well ...

Prince Arthur was at Notman's on Saturday, and had a great many negatives taken. I had to print the solar one (I do that altogether now). The solar is the largest size print, as large as any of the pictures in our parlour.

Well, as I was saying, I printed the solar, but while I was away at dinner, Mr. L—, the foreman, said he would mind it. I gave it in his charge, but when I came back the picture was spoiled. He had moved the negative and had printed two heads, two pairs of arms, and one pair of legs. Mr. Notman gave him a blowing up, and told me not to leave it in the charge of anyone else again.

So you can judge for yourself how I am getting along, when the foreman could not take my place for an hour without doing mischief.

No more,

Love to all,

Your aff. son

John.

P.S.—I will print a small one of the Prince and send it to you.

His Royal Highness might well have looked askance at this contorted image of his person! But the fact is that

the negatives were good and one of them was particularly good. Yet as though some relentless fate connected with this affable scion of Royalty were determined to overwhelm poor John, a real disaster now occurred. The best plate of them all came to grief. It was not entirely John's fault; but he was personally responsible; the firm dispensed with his services, and towards the close of the year he returned to his native town, smarting under a reprimand. For the time being his wings were clipped and a sight of Perth did not soothe his spirit.

He found the home circle narrowed. Two of his older brothers were practising law in what was known as "the West", namely, Toronto and Brantford. Another, who had lately married, was a banker; and two others were in business elsewhere. His second sister, Eliza, had followed in Sarah's footsteps, by marrying a Methodist minister, of whom the supply—matrimonially speaking—seemed to be almost inexhaustible.

He found his father preoccupied with the trend of public affairs. As the new year dawned, Fenian activities again caused disquietude, while stories of actual persecution in the far north-western territories began to trickle along the difficult mail routes.

Canada's nationhood was not to be won without a struggle.

## CHAPTER IV

### OFF TO RED RIVER

(1870)

EVENTS leading up to the first Riel disturbance have been recounted so often that a detailed review of them would be superfluous in this history of John Kerr's adventures. When *finis* was written, in 1869, to the annals of the great fur companies, and the authorities made ready to take over their immense holdings, it was inevitable that western halfbreeds, the *Métis*, should be disquieted by the transfer. Their fears might have been allayed by more adequate explanations, though there are historians who doubt this and claim that violence was already in search of a pretext for action. The apprehensive *Métis* found a champion in young Louis Riel, a settler of French and Indian ancestry, and under his leadership turned back the newly-appointed Canadian governor at the American border, captured Fort Garry and established a government of their own. They struck at the white settlers of Red River district who opposed them, dealing out imprisonment and abuse.

The culminating blow was the murder of young Thomas Scott in early March of 1870. Indignant mass meetings were general throughout the East. The *Toronto Leader* of April 11th describes a great meeting held on



Saturday, April 9th, at the site of Alderman Hallam's warehouse on Front Street, "for the purpose of passing resolutions calling upon the government to reject with scorn Riel's delegates from Red River". Mr. Thomas Nixon, in moving the resolution, said that "the people had assembled that evening because one of their fellow-citizens had been foully murdered at Fort Garry, by an ignorant and impertinent usurper".

Mr. Hugh Scott, brother of the murdered man, seconded the motion. He spoke of his "aged father and mother, overwhelmed with grief, but consoled by the knowledge that their son had died in a noble cause, and that his countrymen were ready to avenge his death".

Cries of "Yes, we will!" echoed along Front Street, and re-echoed in many a boyish heart throughout Canada. Recruiting for a force to proceed to the scene of these outrages, under the future Lord Wolseley, went on apace.

John Kerr had been at his home in Perth since before the new year. He was out of humour and at loose ends, and his adolescent dreams mingled with this fresh incentive towards adventure. He was now nineteen, and his father, so he says, "had no liking for an unemployed son loafing about the house". John had confided in his mother, and it did not surprise him when his father called him into the sitting-room one April afternoon.

George Kerr was balancing his books. His upper lip had a way of appearing quizzical, kindly and uncompromising, all at once. But then it was an Irish upper lip; however cryptic its expression it left no doubt at any time of its owner's nationality.

"Your mother tells me that you want to go to Red River?" George enquired.

"Yes, sir," replied John.

"How do you propose to get there?"

"I don't know—but I'll go if I have to walk!"

"How would you like to go as a volunteer?"

"Fine!" cried the lad, with enthusiasm born of a great desire to enlist, and a deep relief that the suggestion should actually have emanated from his father.

"Very well, then, I'll see what can be done about it," agreed the elder Kerr, shutting his ledger and leaving the room.

John bounded upstairs, three steps at a time, to tell his young brother, Charlie, that he was going soldiering—to Red River—then he set off along the familiar Perth streets to Captain Scott's quarters. He met his father issuing from the door. George Kerr did not fear his son's withdrawal from the project; but when a decision had been reached he acted quickly.

The youth, to borrow his own words, "was tickled pink". Five lads were to leave Perth by train for Brockville, where various tests were to be made. The days, whirling by, brought his last night at Tara Cottage, the Kerr homestead. Too excited to sleep, John tossed and turned, until the flickering of a candle and the sound of soft footsteps ushered his mother into the room. Catharine set her candle on the chest of drawers. She looked older somehow, her maternal figure hovering protectively over the long shape under the patchwork quilt. None of her brood had as yet flown as far as John was to fly. She

made a pretense of checking the articles in the little valise, still open upon a table, then sat beside her son on the bed, took his hand, and let her tears fall silently. John was perhaps her best-loved son, all his ways were her ways, and she foresaw a long parting. For the moment he was a little child again. With one sob and a last caress, he cried, "I'll be good, Ma, I'll be good!"

The medical examination at Brockville proved to be very severe. John says: "When I saw big strapping fellows come out of the Doctor's room, looking downcast—some even blubbering because they had been rejected—I took my turn in fear and trembling." Not since the attack of stage fright at the old singing-master's concert, had he been so ill at ease. But this was the Doctor's verdict: "If they were all like you, young man, I wouldn't have much trouble." Rugged health was the strict requirement.

Organization took place in Brockville, and John lined up with fifty men, afterwards known as No. 7 Company, 1st Ontario Rifles, the officers in charge being Captain Thomas Scott, Lieutenant D. A. McDonald (subsequently Quartermaster-general of Canada) and Ensign J. Jones Bell.

From Brockville they went to Toronto and took up their quarters in the old Crystal Palace where they stayed for some little time "fitting out, drilling, and shaping up". This building, a miniature of the great Crystal Palace in England, was situated on Queen Street West, close to the institution now known as the Ontario Hospital. It was erected in 1858 to house exhibits of the Provincial Exhibition. Troops were quartered there in 1866 as well as in 1870. In 1878 it was removed to the present Canadian

National Exhibition park, where it remained until it was destroyed by fire in 1906. The *Canadian Illustrated News* for June 11th, 1870, contains a picture of Red River troops drilling in the spacious grounds which then surrounded this ambitious structure.

Over sixty years after his job of soldiering was done John Kerr found a letter he had written to his father on the Queen's Birthday, 1870, from the Crystal Palace, and it set a flock of memories flying hither and yon. When Colonel S. P. Jarvis inspected Coy. No. 7 in Toronto, he asked each man to report the nature of his former occupation. It was with mixed feelings that John replied, "Photographer." The Colonel then offered to see that John was provided with equipment to take pictures, if he so desired; but nothing further seems to have come of this offer. Another recollection concerned an evening at the theatre, when John in the company of his cousin, George Kerr, also a volunteer, was delighted by the acting of the incomparable Sally Holman, then the toast of Toronto.

Before May had passed, the boys of No. 7 took train from Toronto for Owen Sound, where they embarked on the old *Chicora* for Prince Arthur's Landing. This name was bestowed by their leader, Colonel Wolseley, on the tiny settlement on Superior's northern shore, now known as the city of Port Arthur. Thus honour was done to the young Prince—then still in Canada—whose pictured features John had wrecked.

Public interest in the undertaking ran high. *The London Times* hoped that "the scene would not be a scene of action". It added:

The universal belief is that the Expedition will find no enemy but a warm welcome, at the Red River, while the presence of an Imperial officer in command will take away the appearance of a Canadian invasion, and allow scope for loyal feeling. But nothing is to be left to chance.

There followed an account of arms and preparations. Seven companies of the 60th Rifles, regulars from the Old Country, with detachments of the Royal Artillery, Royal Engineers, Army Hospital Corps and Army Service Corps were supported by two battalions of Canadian militia, one from Ontario, the other from Quebec.

A young and active force in the pink of condition, was necessary to cope with that western wilderness. The Dawson route from the lake-head had long been the avenue to the West, but it was another story to transport troops with all their requirements over the steep portages. Wolseley himself, a man of thirty-seven, was young indeed for so knotty and responsible a command.

How it rained! The summer of 1870 held the record for over sixty years. During June and July torrents of rain fell,<sup>1</sup> working a great hardship. Thunder rolled constantly over the rocky river-beds with which the men were soon to become familiar, and "Thunder Bay" appealed to the whole force as anything but a misnomer.

While John's company camped at the Landing, he was partially relieved from regular duty, as he acted as orderly or batman for Captain Scott. "I was handy at cooking," he explains, "and prepared some of the meals for our officers, though they ate also at the officers' mess."

<sup>1</sup> The highest rainfall in June ever recorded amounted to 8.09 inches in 1870.

Various means of transport had to be tried out, before Colonel Wolseley could determine which offered the greatest hope of success. He had a problem to solve, that intrepid soldier! His troops had to cover six hundred miles of wilderness, ascending a watershed eight hundred feet in height. No reinforcements, no provisions could be received. Laden with supplies for sixty days, tools, tents, utensils, blankets, ammunition, each boat must in itself be heavy enough to withstand rough usage and rocky portaging, yet light enough to carry for a mile or more at a stretch.

The job had to be calculated to the last inch, while every contingency had to be provided for, without telegraphic aid. Hundreds of *voyageurs* lent themselves to the task. Sail, oar, and muscle were to furnish the motive power, and there was great need of haste. What if the Regulars on their return to Canada were unable to get over the watershed before heavy frosts set in! "Push On!" was the cry. "The men worked," says Wolseley, "as if the Old Gentleman himself were driving them."

The seemingly impossible was finally accomplished, when it was proved beyond doubt that boats could be taken over a certain part of the route which had been pronounced unnavigable. The waterway from the Matawin bridge was finally declared feasible, and much of the toilsome road-making was abandoned.

John's company "took to the roads" on July 3rd. "The water along the route," he writes, "was not good. It was very cool, but saline, and I drank it greedily, with the result that I was soon a very sick boy." In lieu of further explanation, let the correspondent of the *Toronto Telegraph*

with the Red River expedition intervene with a story he sent to his paper from Oskondagee Creek:

### *Illness in the Camp*

But there was one man in the camp who could not go to work—that was John Kerr. Jack is a brave fellow. Last Wednesday when marching between the Kaministiquia bridge and here, he was taken ill; and after having passed the Matawin a mile, he was so ill that his officers asked him to return and go into the hospital for a few days. Jack turned with a sore heart; but when he came in sight of the camp at the Matawin his spirit rose within him for the nonce, and he said to himself, "I'll not let the Regulars see a Volunteer break down in me;" so he wheeled about and plodded after his companions, and made up on them after dragging himself along five weary miles.

He did reach camp, but has been in bed ever since with dysentery. I happened to pass his tent this morning, and I heard him crying. I looked in and there the poor fellow was lying in agony. He was far away from his home and friends; but he had one little friend which nestled on the pillow at his head. It was a little white dog which licked Jack's head, and seemed as if it knew he was ill, and was trying to comfort him. Some of his companions rushed in too, and one ran for the doctor; but the doctor was away up the road three miles. But it did not matter for

### *The Doctor Has No Medicine*

There are several doctors, and none of them that I have met have any medicine. It is a gross shame. . . . Here were men coming away on a long, weary and hard journey—where the diet was an almost total revolution to what they had been accustomed to—where bad water is sure to be met, and has been met with—where everything went to

show the probability of disease—and yet no medicine. . . . I have mentioned the case of Jack Kerr to bring out two points. First, that the volunteers are stuffer and more spirited fellows than some . . . give them credit for; and secondly to call attention to the miserable state of the medical arrangements of the army.

This despatch, which is quoted only in part, reveals the fact that John had managed to smuggle a dog along with the expedition. The reporter may not have been quite fair to the authorities, but the news of John's illness cast consternation on the family circle; his oldest brother, Dawson, received the report in Illinois, William wrote anxiously from Brantford to Perth, Catharine cut out the despatch, which was copied into a Perth paper, and kept it till her son's return.

John's own story of this misadventure is thus vividly recounted:

It's true that I didn't want to be called a tenderfoot by the regulars, and it is also true that my small dog raised merry hell when they tried to take him away from me! But if I report the sequel to this incident, I do so for two reasons only—to show how much greater a stickler for discipline was the officer of the Regulars than the officer in charge of a Volunteer force; and to describe the unusual, yet seemingly efficacious, medical treatment that I received.

They made a stretcher, loaded me into a lumber wagon, and I was painfully jolted over the rough roads to the hospital tent at the Landing. Arrived there, I was too blamed weak to stand without assistance, when I was taken into the august presence of the Doctor in charge—a real old British Regular, wedded to military etiquette. He bellowed:

“Don't you know enough to salute your superior?”



Practically fainting, I mumbled something about being very weak.

"These d-----d volunteers want a lesson in manners, by ---!" he exclaimed.

Now this was the treatment he ordered. I was placed on the ground. A blanket was wrung out of a tub of hot water by two orderlies, each supplied with a pair of tongs. This steaming object was laid upon my anatomy regardless—absolutely regardless—of my yelling bloody murder. I was virtually parboiled; but they dipped, wrung and applied that blanket with true military precision. It did the work, and in four days I was on my way back to Oskondagee Creek!

The first and most difficult objective of the force was Lake Shebandowan, a lovely stretch of water, twenty miles long, and eight hundred feet above Superior. Trying out water routes, cutting through forests, building bridges and corduroy roads, making camps, storing food, toting ammunition—the days were all too short for the work before them.

The whole district had recently been burnt cinder-black, and now the frequent cloudbursts produced mud of the stickiest and most depressing variety, but constantly there rang out the marching-song, *We'll hoist the Union Jack on Fort Garry!*

Heat and insects—of many varieties—added to the discomfort of the troops and Lake Shebandowan often seemed like a mirage. Moreover, once moored upon its shores, the boats would have to be overhauled after dragging them up those roaring rapids. But, from Shebandowan onwards, nearly all the rest of the route, with the exception of the

ascent of the Red from its mouth to Fort Garry, lay down-hill. Down-hill, in some cases over real cascades, with a matter of seventeen portages in the three hundred and ten miles to the Lake of the Woods, and thirty more in the dangerous Winnipeg River.

Colonel Wolseley had vowed that the first detachment of boats containing some of the Regulars would leave Lake Shebandowan by July 16th for the network of lakelets, streams, and portages, that formed the path to Rainy Lake. It had not seemed humanly possible up to a day or two beforehand, but at long last the whole force reached the heights. Meanwhile, on July 15th (St. Swithin's Day), Shebandowan herself staged the star storm of the season. Other storms had blown huge pines into the Kaministiquia, overturned stables, and the like, but to this particular tempest all others were as mere zephyrs.

The next day was bright, though a gale blew, and only at sunset was Wolseley able to fulfil his vow by despatching the first boatloads. By August 2nd the last boat had cleared away, and the expedition covered a distance of one hundred and fifty miles from front to rear, the boats of each company keeping together.

John's diary commences with the exodus, on July 21st, of Company No. 7 from Shebandowan. The lake's famous echo had often been roused by the songs of the force, and No. 7 seems to have held the palm for vocal exercise—a fact often dwelt upon with glee by John himself, in later years.

## CHAPTER V

### POTS AND PORTAGES

WITH many flourishes John wrote the title-page of his diary, dedicating it to his young brother:

J. A. KERR'S SOLDIER LIFE

FROM THE TIME HE STARTED SAILING ON THE LAKES

*To Charley*

*Thursday, July 21st, 1870.* Left Lake Shebandowan at about 5 P.M., in six boats commanded by:

	BOAT NO.	NAME	MEN
Major Wainwright	1	"Leaky Sallie" .....	13
Captain Scott	2	"Shoo Fly" .....	11
Ensign Bell	3	"Dreadnought" .....	11
Q.M. Armstrong	4	"Fanny Latimer" .....	11
Sergt. Nesbit	5	"Fairy Belle" .....	10
Lt. D. A. K. McDonald	6	"D.A.K." .....	11

We rowed about ten miles, camped for the night on a small island, rising the next morning at 4 A.M.

*Friday, July 22nd.* Had breakfast over, and were away in the boats at five. We reached the first portage at eight, and found one of the companies of the 60th Rifles there. We could not go on until they had left the portage, and were delayed several hours in consequence. Then we commenced portaging. It was awful work . . .

Each man is provided with a tump-line, that is a long leather strap, wide in the middle and tapering off from there. He fastens this on a barrel of pork or biscuit, or a bag of beans, and raises it up so that the strap passes over his head, the line resting on his forehead, and the barrel or bag on his back. You have seen squaws carrying baskets or babies around. That is the way we carried our stuff over . . . The length of this portage is three-quarters of a mile . . . Slept on the open ground.

*Saturday, July 23rd.* Rose at 4.30 and got all the stuff over by 8 P.M., including the boats. But the Major thought that too late to start, so we stayed there all night, sleeping on mother earth.

*Sunday, July 24th.* Left at 5 A.M., and reached the height of land portage, escaping Little Pond portage by wading through a small artificial creek, up to our breasts in mud, rushes, water and leeches, which swam around us in hundreds. We started to portage across on the heels of the 60th. Colonel Wolseley passed us to-day in a bark canoe paddled by thirteen Indians. Our cook not giving satisfaction to the boat's crew, I was requested to take charge of the culinary department. I accordingly did so, on the condition that I was to do no portaging.

A few years before John's death, a prominent Ontario citizen made the preposterous charge that Wolseley travelled by train from Toronto to Pembina, and never even saw his troops *en route*! This is contradicted by many authorities, including Lord Wolseley, Sir William Butler, and Sir Samuel Steele; but John was appealed to by a newspaper columnist at the time the charge was made, and furnished the above item from his diary, elaborating it with further details.

With respect to the toil of portaging: John adds a little footnote to the common tale of the 200-lb. barrels of pork, under which he and his sinewy companions grew accustomed to sweating. "It was the boxes of rifles," he records, "that were harder to carry than pork barrels. The sharp edges cut into our flesh." He seems to have been rather astute in claiming exemption from burden-bearing on the strength of his ability to cook, but there is evidence that he continued to share in that work, and, further, that his special task was anything but a sinecure.

The following is a page from a letter he wrote in 1934:

How we used to make the welkin ring with *My Old Grey Mare and I*, and kindred rollicking songs, in those days of my youth! At night we'd sit around the camp fires, sing, and yarn about the day's doings. But no matter when we went to bed that blamed bugler would far far too soon blow reveille—or as the boys called it, revallee . . . though, for my part, I was usually up long before, getting the breakfast ready for our boat's crew. Many and many a night I hadn't more than an hour or two of sleep, for I had to stay up at night making bannocks, boiling beans and pork (no breakfast bacon, not by a long chalk!) so as to have as little to do as possible for breakfast. But, oh boy! How those boat-crews could stow away the grub! Ten or twelve hungry men can clean up a lot of stuff.

Then I had to have enough to serve for dinner and supper, because we stopped only about an hour at noon. So I usually had pork and beans and bannock enough to warm up at noon and night. Sometimes I let the bannock go, and then we had hard-tack, desiccated potatoes, dried apples and little else. The hard-tack I soaked in water for

awhile till it split, and I'd fry it in good pork lard. It made, tasty eating, with a little sugar sprinkled on it.

Oh, we didn't starve, though we had *no bread, nor fresh meat, nor delicacies of any kind*; but we appeared to thrive on our rations.

The cubes of desiccated potatoes made a sticky mess when cooked, but, *"like beans and rice, swelled up a lot"*. What the fare lacked was saleratus; or any leavening agent. *"Still, we 'lived, moved, and had our being' free from bodily ills."*

The height of land portage was a mile and a half in length. All of Monday, July 25th, was spent in crossing it, and rain broke upon the tired men after they had fallen asleep. John and a couple of Brockville boys, rudely roused, crept under the boats for shelter.

*Tuesday, July 26th.* Left at ten, and reached Baril portage, a distance of twenty miles, about 8 P.M., having had a head wind for sixteen of them. A company of the 60th is here. The portage is an awful one, over rocks fifteen and twenty feet high, almost perpendicular. Distance, four hundred yards.

This Baril portage is singled out for its difficulty by various writers. Company No. 7 got all its equipment across during Wednesday, July 27th, and was then delayed until the Regulars had resumed travel on the route. The Canadian Volunteers were not permitted at any time to pass these seasoned troops from the Old Country.

Two men from Fort Garry, in a bark canoe, appeared on the horizon, and the militiamen joked with them on the size of Riel's army, and the time it had taken them to cover the distance from Fort Garry.

In 1870 little or nothing was known to the white man of the terrain beyond the beaten routes from east to west. Now the surveyor has penetrated to every quarter of the region: Those who yield to the seduction of detailed maps will find a fascination in tracing the various watercourses and portages that formed the links in this old travel-chain known as the Dawson route. John was by no means insensible to its wild beauty or heedless of its peculiarities. A "fair breeze" on July 28th wafted his company to Brûlé portage, whence they entered a creek; they camped eight miles further on. "The quartermaster's boat was slightly damaged," he records. The next morning they "set out very early, and met Dawson and his band of Indians in a bark canoe." [Dawson was in charge of transport, and the hiring of *voyageurs* for the expedition.]

Passed through some beautiful creeks and lakes, nice, sandy bottoms with any amount of fish. But we soon entered the rapids and had to wade up to our breasts, holding back the boats for fear of their being dashed to pieces against the rocks. Charlie Bell nearly broke his leg between a large stone and the boat. But, by this same wading, we saved nearly two miles of portaging. . . . Reached French portage at night.

*Saturday, July 30th.* We took everything across, boats and all. There was a most beautiful fall of water here (the cause of the portage). It came down, down, down, a distance of over two hundred feet, not all at once, but twenty, thirty, forty and fifty feet at a time, and there were so many rocks and huge boulders that the water was kept in a constant turmoil, tumbling, splashing, rushing, with a noise like thunder. We passed over—or rather, by—this fall, and entered into the river or creek of which it was

the beginning. We rowed ten miles down the most tortuous stream you ever saw, or will see. At the end of every fifteen or twenty yards an abrupt turn was sure to meet you, going almost back to where you started. You can form some idea when I tell you that, although we rowed ten or eleven miles, yet in a straight air-line it was a short two miles. The stream was only from six to fifteen feet wide at the source, and thirty or forty feet at the mouth. Banks high and steep.

The last day of July introduced the company to a series of creeks and small lakes, a river and a larger lake with an odd Indian name, and finally a camping-site formed by a round rock "six inches deep in moss, and full of black ants". John White, their Indian *voyageur*, had caught "several fine pike, pickerel and maskinonge", which John Kerr cooked, as he records, "to the veins of nicety", but when they had seated themselves at the banquet one of the soldier lads jumped to his feet, let his plate of fish and pork roll into the fire, and shrieked that a snake had bitten him! As he rolled up his pants his alarmed comrades "stood ready with stones and sticks to kill the monster"—but only a small black ant could be discerned.

At Pine portage, on August 1st, there was a splendid place for swimming. "Of course I was in," writes John, and adds:

Our *voyageur* is a splendid diver, but I beat him by nine feet or more. He has long black hair and swims the same as a dog, one hand over the other. He looked curious, swimming along under the water, with his hair away back on his shoulders.

John does not boast unduly of his prowess in diving—as will later appear.



*Tuesday, August 2nd.* We crossed Doré or Jackfish Lake to Deux Rivières, a terrible portage—big hills and deep gullies to tramp over, with a barrel of pork on your back. Charlie Bell gave up cooking for his boat's crew; they always were grumbling. He lost his knapsack and all it contained.

The Charlie Bell whose misfortunes are recounted above is better known as Charles Napier Bell, LL.D., F.R.G.S., an influential figure in the West, closely identified, from early manhood to his death in 1936, with the progress of Manitoba. A native of Perth, he was well-known to John Kerr, who, in old age, wrote thus of their association:

Charlie didn't enlist at Perth. He was only sixteen years old, but he hiked it to Toronto when he found that his cousin, J. Jones Bell, was appointed Ensign to our company. I was setting my kit in order in the old Crystal Palace, when in walked Charlie! We hunted up Captain Scott and Ensign Bell, and they fixed it up that I was to act as Captain Scott's orderly or batman, and Charlie as Ensign Bell's. . . . We were buddies, slept together on the way from Thunder Bay to the North West Angle. . . . Again we had our beds side by side in barracks at Fort Garry.

On August 3rd the watercourses began to be enlivened by long rapids down which the boats were run by Indian guides. At the next encounter with "white water", John's boat, daring the rapids without a guide, came to grief.

We ran her against a large rock. The water came pouring in, and we had not time to get her ashore before all the cargo was floating around. I jumped out and swam

with the rope a little distance, and gave it to one of the men on shore; all the crew, save the Captain, jumped in before the boat was twenty yards from the bank, and swam, holding to her side. We got everything we owned wringing wet, and were obliged to throw away seven barrels of hard-tack, and two bags of beans. Our rifles, belts and accoutrements were all wet, rusty and blue-moulded. . . . Four miles farther on, at another rapid, ten more guides were stationed to run our boats over. In fact we ran rapids nearly all day.

From August 4th to the evening of the 6th the story differs little in detail from the foregoing. Rocks, rapids, portages. Portages, rapids, rocks. On Sunday, August 7th, the first mention is made of Rainy Lake.

All afternoon we rowed against a fearful headwind. Camped on an island in Rainy Lake. Any amount of savages came after us in their barks, and followed us for the rest of our journey. They are all wild-looking, half-starved creatures, almost naked, with hair as long as, or longer than, your arm, plaited like a Chinaman's. They have very curious pipes.

*Monday, August 8th.* Sailed along without pulling an oar (only one sail and a tarpaulin rigged up as one). While bowling along at six or seven miles an hour, we spied on an island a hut, then perceived an Indian in a canoe heading for us. He held out a birchbark dish full of blueberries. We had a barrel of wet hard-tack that wouldn't keep, so we pulled towards shore and gave him barrel and all.

He thanked us, but not gladly. Then George Hamilton, one of our crew, offered him a piece of tobacco and he went mad with joy, so we gave him several bits. You never

saw anyone so crazy in your life. He did not care as much for the bread that would keep him alive, as for the tobacco.

We passed some of the 60th, but let them go on again, as it was against orders to pass them. At three o'clock we arrived at Fort Frances where we were stationed for six weeks.

That John Kerr's company was among the first of the Volunteer force to reach Fort Frances may account for the fact that they were chosen as the "one company of the Ontario battalion . . . ~~to be left~~ at Fort Frances, for protection of reserve stores, awaiting the return of the Regulars from Fort Garry, when they should proceed to their destination."

As this settlement on the Rainy was an important pivotal position—in more senses than one—John's detention here provides us, through his diary and his written recollections, with some lively stories and descriptive comment.

## CHAPTER VI

### LINGERING ON THE RAINY

THE name Rainy<sup>1</sup> is not derived from the English "rain"; the climate is no more humid in that district than in the surrounding territory. Rainy River is the Queen of Rivers, acclaimed by early French explorers *la reine des rivières* as the lake from which it takes its source was acclaimed the Queen of Lakes. Realms of river and lake meet some two or three miles above the town of Fort Frances at Pither's Point. Here the two Queens conspire in a species of treachery which has cost the life of many an adventurer. The waters of the great lake rush too impetuously into the narrow channel of the river, and a swift, suspiciously quiet rapid, marked by the dimpled waters of suction eddy, and whirlpool, has eaten deep into the river-bed. Poised for a moment at the top of this rapid, a war-canoe is seized, as by a giant hand, and hurled downward. Immediately below is a much noisier but far less insidious stretch of white water, whence the stream broadens out majestically on its way to the town. The force of these rapids has been diminished by the development of water power on the river at the town-site, where a most

<sup>1</sup> It must be admitted that early maps are lettered with the name *Lac La Pluie*, yet the "Queen" theory will not be downed among those jealous of the Lake's good reputation.

beautiful fall has been harnessed in the interests of the pulp industry.

At a bend in the river almost opposite the then unfettered cataract stood the Hudson's Bay post named Fort Frances after Lady Simpson, wife of the redoubtable Sir George, famed Governor of the great fur company. This spot had long been an important post, not only for trading, but also as a depot for supplies and equipment and as a resort for travellers emerging from the wild hinterland between Lake Superior and Rainy Lake. The falls—called "beautiful" by John—resembled the Chaudière Falls at Ottawa. In 1870 there was practically nothing at the site in the way of a settlement but the log buildings of the fort and a few ragged Indian huts.

Yet the situation was connected with various bits of strategy, and at this particular juncture it was a rendezvous of note. We are told that Colonel Wolseley "at Fort Frances, on Rainy River, on the last day of July, was to meet a loyal half-breed with news of Red River". This man was punctual, and brought valuable information. All in the district were "in abject dread". The Anglican bishop described a desperate feeling of uncertainty as Riel assumed, more and more, the province of dictator.

It was at the site of the vicious rapid, at Pither's Point, on August 4th, that Butler, then a young lieutenant, conferred with Colonel Wolseley. Butler tells in *The Great Lone Land* of the meeting, and of the thrilling adventures which preceded it. He had made his way to Fort Garry via the Red River route, fighting suspicion and effecting some narrow escapes in which his naturally dark colouring proved a protection. Finally, on July 23rd, he had inter-

viewed Riel at Fort Garry, resolutely refusing to seek out the dictator, and so manoeuvring the matter that Riel had to seek *him* out, the while he was nonchalantly playing billiards. He preserved this nonchalance till Riel "darted away"—then made all possible speed *via* the Winnipeg River route for Fort Frances. As a trained scout he was shrewdly certain of the trouble in store for the entire district if the megalomaniac Riel were not checked.

In *Forty Years in Canada* Steele tells of the haste with which his company (No. 4) left Fort Frances.

"On Saturday, August 13th, we loaded our boats with frenzied eagerness, lest on the arrival of our Colonel next day we might be ordered to remain behind. We received no orders, but there seemed to be something in the wind, and as soon as each boat was loaded, it departed with all speed, and was quickly beyond recall.

It may be that the soldiers who reached Fort Frances after John's company arrived there, were disposed to pity No. 7 for its detention at this point. As a matter of fact the boys who remained had a few adventures on their own account, made use of the time not occupied with military duties to become acquainted with the wild country and its Indian population, and had the advantage of observing succeeding units as they streamed along the river and of coming in contact with various notabilities also *en route* for Manitoba. They engaged in sports—swimming, racing, football. They even formed a Glee Club. In the end they were not obliged to remain for six weeks. They had orders, on August 29th, according to John's diary, to "proceed to their destination" on September

ist, that is to set off down the Rainy River to the Lake of the Woods on their way to Fort Garry. What was of more importance than any other aspect of the affair was that before August 29th had dawned the whole trouble had been resolved by the flight of Riel and his cohorts on the 24th. Not even the Regular force had been required to fire a shot, and none of the Volunteer soldiers were present as the rebels escaped.

Meanwhile, after noting the beauty of the river and falls at Fort Frances in his diary, John turns to the bird life of the district. "There are a great many ducks, pigeons, snipe, and other wildfowl around here. The snipe are so tame that you can knock three or four over with a stick at any hour of the day on the shore." On August 11th, he and his companions saw the Indians, camped thereabouts, dancing and gambling for tobacco. "Charlie and I," he adds, "occupy our old posts as orderlies to Ensign Bell and Captain Scott. We get milk, butter, new potatoes, corn, preserves, cream and other things from Mrs. McKenzie, the factor's wife at the fort. We are getting soft bread."

In many a subsequent recollection, John dwells on the kindness dispensed by the McKenzies from the old log buildings of the Hudson's Bay fort. But Mrs. McKenzie, however generous she may have been with the stores at her disposal, could not often bestow such delicacies upon half a hundred hungry boys, and John continued to cook as heretofore. A story he often told concerns an incident in his career as *chef*.

Hunger is a good sauce. Let me tell you what happened one day while we were stationed at Fort Frances.

As cook for our officers, Captain Scott, Lieutenant McDonald, and Ensign Bell, I sometimes regretted that our fare was so monotonous. Bean soup, as a steady diet palls in the end—at least so Captain Scott thought, and he told me one day not to make any more for awhile. Later, he was called to a meeting at the fort with the factor and others, and was kept till long after the dinner hour. I met him just near our tent. He walked along smartly, clapping his hands and calling to me:

"By ---, I'm hungry, Jack. They kept me there arguing about nothing. Have you got some good bean soup?"

"No, sir," I returned, "you told me not to make any more for a few days."

"I never said anything of the kind," he declared.

"Yes, you did," I insisted.

"I did not," objected the Captain.

"That's a lie, you did," I repeated, before I thought.

Without a word, he went into the tent. I got his dinner ready, and took it to him, and then and there made my apology. The other officers had heard me give the Captain the lie, and they had also heard him tell me not to make soup for awhile. They told him that I spoke the truth, but expected Scott to take some action on account of my language. He never did. I was heartily ashamed, and for a time kept out of his sight as much as possible. Like many of the Volunteers, I was an undisciplined cub; but I tell this incident just to contrast it with that other in the hospital tent at Prince Arthur's Landing, and also to show that a hungry man is not so particular. A bowl of the old bean soup would have looked pretty good to Captain Scott just then.

The militia officers and the staff at the fort had grave responsibilities at that time. Restive bands of Indians far



outnumbered the whites in the district. They were ignorant and superstitious, and the presence of the young soldiers might easily have aroused their suspicions. As to the savages across the border on the Minnesota shore, Butler describes them as both vicious and violent. No wonder there was some anxiety on Friday, August 19th, when John's diary records:

A big meeting of the Indians to-day. They had a war-dance after which they were presented with a few trinkets, tobacco, hard-tack, pork, and so forth. At twelve or one o'clock we were awakened by the guards, ordered to put on our accoutrements, and lie down again with our rifles ready for instant action. A raid on the Fort was expected. The savages had been beating the tom-tom for a couple of days, and the factor scented trouble. We saw signals of some sort being made by the Indians across the river. Arrows with little balls of fire attached were shot into the air—why, we never knew. However, there was no real disturbance.

Four days later, on August 23rd, Adams G. Archibald, first Lieutenant-governor of the newly formed Province of Manitoba, passed the Fort Frances district unmolested.

He was serenaded at his tent by the Choir of No. 7, among them J. A. Kerr, Full Bass. . . . The Governor came out and thanked us handsomely. He regretted, he said, that he had nothing in the way of drink, such as raspberry vinegar, currant wine, or cold water, but nevertheless was highly pleased with the singing performance.

This bit of persiflage smacks of the all-things-to-all-men diplomatist many considered Mr. Archibald. One of his staff gave a magic lantern show, which fascinated the

Indians. "You never in your life saw creatures so delighted," comments John. "They laughed loudly, grunted, 'oughed' and carried on like men possessed."

As August approached its end, John was to experience one more thrill that seemed like a Beadle's Dime Novel come to life. The diary entry concerning it is fragmentary, but he has left a full account of it among his reminiscences.

*August 27th.* The Great Medicine Man arrived last night, and there was feasting and rejoicing throughout the Indian encampments. To-day they killed a white dog and cooked it whole. I saw them dragging it, just after killing it, to the enclosure.

So it was that John witnessed one of the most secret of Indian rites, the Feast of the White Dog. Always thirsty for excitement he had hung about a camp of Chippewa Indians, half-a-mile up the Rainy, wherein something of moment seemed to be taking place. A squaw had given birth to a papoose, and both were gravely ill. John caught a glimpse of the ailing pair, set off for the cook-tent in thoughtful mood, took a saucepan from its hook, and measured out some meal. Soon he was on his way back to the encampment, carrying a can of oatmeal gruel. He was met with menacing gestures, though his offering was accepted by a squaw near the sick woman. So he retired outside the camp, hiding himself, and watching the proceedings from underneath the brushwood boundary.

Under a canopy at one end of the enclosure lay the two patients.

The Dog was boiling in a big copper kettle hung over the fire. Fifty or sixty Indians with a few squaws were seated around the brush walls. The big kettle containing

the Dog was in the centre, and in a couple of smaller vessels tea was steeping. They made a sort of soup of the Dog. Presently the Medicine Man took a pipe with a very long stem, lit the mixed tobacco and red willow bark, and, pointing the stem to the four points of the compass, took a couple of whiffs, and passed it on to the man next him. Each successive brave took a whiff or two, and so the pipe passed, being replenished at intervals.

During this ritual, the Medicine Man made a long harangue—hopping, jumping, and skipping about. Finally he ladled some of the mixture from the big kettle, made passes with it to the cardinal points, walked over to the sick woman, who took a little sup and then lay down again. He repeated this ceremony with the tea, and then gave her some sort of skin. Others followed him in like manoeuvres, after which the squaws served the Dog—though some of the braves helped themselves.

I ventured from my hiding-place and, to my surprise, the sick woman's husband brought over a bone with a little meat on it, to me. I pretended to eat, for I was afraid of angering them, but my gorge rose, and when unobserved I spat it out. I kept that bone for many a day. The squaw and kid got better, and no doubt the cure was attributed to the Medicine Man's magic. But I "hae ma doots!"

September had hardly been ushered in with a promise of rough weather when Company No. 7 followed the other troops to Fort Garry, and John penned in his diary a florid adieu to his sixteen-year-old brother:

This is all very monotonous, to be sure, but still it is just the life I led. I might perhaps have told you more about our boat-racing and other games. . . . You might let

Jack Fraser see this, or Tom Cairns, or any of my acquaintances. I will give you an account of the rest of my doings when I arrive at Fort Garry. . . . My respected and well-beloved brother, Chas. Kerr, Esq.

JOHN KERR.

The party of six boats encountered a gale of no mean order on the Lake of the Woods, John related in subsequent years:

I was in the Captain's boat. The wind arose, the waves followed suit, and I—well, if I was a fair soldier, I was a mighty poor sailor—I took to the bottom of the boat with my little dog (he was a White Dog, by the way!) and I wished, oh, how I wished, that the boat would sink. The mast blew out of the seat where it was stuck, the Captain shouted to the men to get the oars to work. Even our Indian pilot was frightened. However, we reached the North-West Angle in safety, but never was I so deathly sick as when crossing that lovely Lake of the Woods.

"The southern reaches of the Lake are more open, and the islands have that curiously wind-blown look, common to parts of Georgian Bay. A reporter attached to the Red River expedition referred to their rakish appearance in humorous terms. They looked as if they had been "making a night of it", he wrote, "and had just settled down at random wherever they were overcome". John once suggested that it might be this drunken irresponsibility which so many of the younger and less conventional Canadian artists were trying to portray! However, the countless wooded islands in the northern section are beautiful beyond words, and are now thronged in the summer-time with

wealthy Westerners. Wolseley "longed to revisit them", although their trick of hiding among promontories led many of the boats—including his own!—astray.

From the famous North-West Angle of the Lake of the Woods, a road had been built part way to Fort Garry. Long before, Wolseley had asked for the completion of this road. He had no intention of using it, and could not have done so, as affairs turned out. But he wished to mislead Riel, and the ruse had had its effect, for the rebel leader had sent a party there. The road was available when Company No. 7 arrived, however, and was travelled by all but one boat load of nineteen men under Ensign Bell who carried medical supplies and followed the route taken by the rest of the expedition. The Ensign and his boys, including John's buddy, Charlie Bell, encountered bad weather while braving the foam and fury of the Winnipeg River, and were the last troops to reach Fort Garry. When they turned up, early in October, they found a search party about to set forth to succour them.

Meanwhile, Colonel Wolseley, on his way back to the East, had met Company No. 7 at the North-West Angle, and spent the night in their camp. The rebellion was over, and not a shot had been fired. *The Times* had predicted truly: the victory had been over great adverse natural conditions rather than over *Métis* or redskins. On August 23rd the advance troops had reached a point nine miles by river from Fort Garry. Scouts reported the rebel flag still flying. Early next morning troops landing two miles north of Winnipeg and advancing on Fort Garry found no signs of life. Riel, Lépine and O'Donoghue had escaped over a bridge of boats.

The soldiers entered the Fort, hoisted the Union Jack, fired a salute, and gave three cheers for good Queen Victoria.

And—for the time being—the Red River settlement was at peace.

CHAPTER VII  
FEATURING FORT GARRY

**B**EFORE his departure for the East, Colonel Wolseley had praised the Volunteer force for their courage and perseverance in the face of obstacles; "although he had served with many armies in the field, he had never been associated with a better set of men". Some years later, in command of the Nile Expedition, he wrote to Canada for a corps of *voyageurs*, which was sent under Colonel W. N. Kennedy, "one of the best soldiers, the finest men," wrote John, "it was ever my good fortune to know".

John had known Kennedy as a lieutenant attached to Company No. 4 of the 1st Ontario Rifles in the Red River force, and again as captain of the Volunteers against the Fenians in 1871. From Company No. 4 also came Private Sam Steele to serve as corporal in Company No. 7. He was just two years John's senior, and they became friends, their comradeship lasting through life, a warm understanding based on shared adventure and similar tastes.

Between August 29th and September 3rd, Wolseley had despatched all the Regulars to Montreal by the route already traversed, but the Volunteers, who had enlisted for a year's service, flocked into Fort Garry. The 1st Ontario Rifles were stationed there, and the 2nd Quebec Rifles manned the Stone or Lower Fort on the western bank of

the Red River some eighteen or twenty miles down north from Winnipeg. Scores of boys from eastern Canada thus became permanently identified with the prairie provinces, or at least were profoundly influenced by their experience in the wilds, and by the extension of their military service under pioneer conditions.

A rather amusing letter from John Kerr to his father, dated October 23rd, 1870, registers a homesick dismay; his surroundings were not the orderly purlicue of Perth:

. . . Fort Garry is a pretty place, ~~at~~ a *distance*, but go near and you are disgusted with the filth and dirt which is seen on all sides. Everything is awfully dear here . . . wood is a very scarce article, hardly any timber around the place. And cold!

I have shaved all my *whiskers* off, and the boys call me Bishop Taché, on account of my resemblance to that old rebel. The bishop is very intimate, by the way, with our Lieutenant, a Mr. McDonald from Cornwall.

Please get your photo taken and send me one. You don't know what a pleasure it is to have likenesses of your kin with you at all times.

Nothing more at present from

Your aff. son,

John A. Kerr

No subject held a greater fascination for Dr. Charles Napier Bell, in his lifelong study of the growth of western Canada, than the romantic history of the ancient forts once situated on the site of the city of Winnipeg. The articles and pamphlets in which, as President of the Historical and Scientific Society of Manitoba, he recorded his discoveries and conclusions, invariably made their way to the



library table of his old buddy, John Kerr. Thus it comes about that many cuttings and pictures of the stone buildings with their four corner bastions, in which the two old men spent one momentous winter of their boyhood, are among the papers left behind by John. On the back of one such photograph appears this inscription:

FORT GARRY, 1858

This is a copy of one of the first photos taken west of Lake Superior (1858). The fort as it was in 1870, but the frame building (the liquor store) was added later, and this view with the liquor store added has been generally considered as the original. This photo is, historically speaking, quite valuable.

C. N. Bell

Winnipeg,  
26 Decr. 1933

The outlines of this old fort, the second of its name, built in 1835, are familiar to every student of Canada's western development. The low, substantial walls, the well-set bastions, the ample gateway, seem specially fitted to guard and serve the prairie round about.

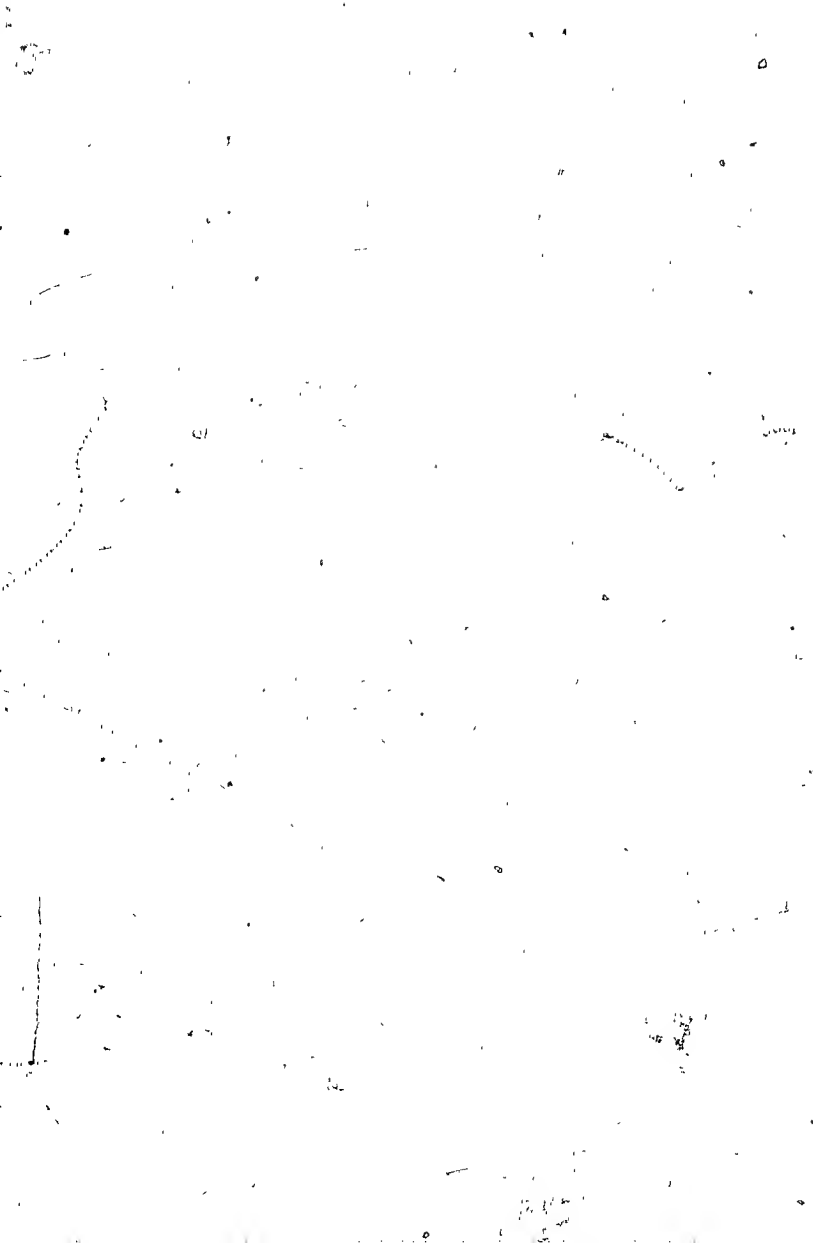
Within these walls, and under their shadow, the dark scenes of Riel's mad dictatorship were enacted. Here his victims were imprisoned, some of them in irons, and all chilled to the marrow by the zero blizzards which seemed to be imprisoned with them. Curling around the stone bastions, these untamed prairie gusts could make themselves cruelly felt—as would appear in one of the first recorded instances of John Kerr's life within the fort. Under the title *Sentry-Go*, he carries us on to the month of January, 1871.



WINNIPEG IN 1869

LIBR

1869



There are highlights of my service in the garrison which even the dust of nearly seventy years cannot dim. One of these is the recollection of a cold day, the coldest I happen to remember in my Manitoba sojourn, January 24th, 1871. Why does this date stand out? Well, it was my birthday, or rather my birthnight. I was on guard duty that day, and our hours for sentry-go were two on and four off.

My particular beat was on the western side of the fort—I mean, of course, Fort Garry. We had sentry-boxes into which we could go at times to escape the cutting winds, but they were poor affairs. A small stick stuck cornerwise in each made a sort of seat.

This night was bright and clear, as so many frosty nights are in the West. I walked up and down pretty smartly to keep warm. We were heavily clad—thick shirt and underwear, tunic, long overcoat, moccasins with flannel or woollen duffle lining, and mitts; but all the same I've seen men get their ears badly frozen while going from the barracks to the parade grounds—a distance of from two hundred to two hundred and fifty feet.

I had for company on my beat a couple of mongrel dogs, hangers-on around the fort, which padded along with me. I got quite warm and went into the cubby-hole of a sentry box, placed my rifle against the side of it, and sat down on the cross-stick, to rest a wee. The two mongrels curled up around my feet, and I let my thoughts drift to my home in the East, wondering if the folks remembered that it was my birthnight. Presently the heat from the bodies of the dogs at my feet began to take effect on me, and I shut my eyes and dozed off, to be awakened by the animals stirring and barking. I just had time to grab my gun, step outside the box and call out, "Who goes there?", when the reply came from the relieving party!

It was a narrow squeak, you can bet. Asleep on duty meant saluting the O.C. in the morning. That was how I spent a couple of hours on the night of my twentieth birthday, at Fort Garry; and although I did not "feel the cold" much, yet the thermometer showed 52° below zero, which was quite frigid enough and, as far as I can remember, the iciest night of my experience.

Perhaps it is not surprising, in view of my youth at the time, that memory lights up the rollicking incidents and passes over those of a more serious aspect. Anyway, I warn you, that these recollections are a bit naughty in parts. Youthful high spirits, sixty to seventy years ago, were just as effervescent as they are to-day. The cup that cheers and inebriates played a considerable role in the sojer's life, especially in his pranks and predicaments.

It is only fair to point out, in this connection, that John could not blame his own pranks, nor even his frequent predicaments, upon intoxicants. In all of his young life he could never be induced to touch a drop of liquor.

Taken by and large, the boys of '70 and '71 were a fine crowd; undismayed by the crude conditions of western life, loyal to their superiors, and devoted to their flag. Not many of them are left in this year of grace, it is safe to say, and therefore a lone survivor, his memory keen as a blade for everything down to the present, may fearlessly indulge in reminiscences. . . .

The old Winnipeg police station, which was later to be my barracks and headquarters when I joined up with the Manitoba Mounted Police, was down Main Street near a ravine, on which subsequently the City Hall was built. This old edifice always brought to mind an occurrence during the time the 1st Ontario Rifles were stationed at Fort Garry. There was in the force a man by the name of

Jack H., who was something of a card-sharper. He had a trick he called "Jack and His Mother", by which, with the aid of an accomplice, he fleeced the natives. It would take too much space to describe the game. As long as his winnings were only a few shillings, the victims made no kick; but when he gathered in over sixty dollars one afternoon, the losers made complaint, and Jack was laid by the heels by the civil authorities, and lodged in the police station.

When his comrades heard of it, they were wrathful at the idea of the civil authorities jailing a soldier. Had H. been brought before the Colonel, and sentenced to a term in the bastille, we would have thought nothing of it; but, rightly or wrongly, we got the idea into our heads that the civil authorities had no jurisdiction in the premises. So, after parade, on the afternoon of the following day, a number of his comrades of No. 4 company, with others who belonged to the battalion, gathered and marched down to the police station, pushed aside the guards, and proceeded to knock the lock off the cell door and liberate H. Not content with this, we smashed the lock from another cell door, and let another inmate, a civilian, free.

"In for a penny, in for a pound," must have been our motto that day! We then formed our ranks, as became good soldiers, and, singing doggerel to the tune of *Marching Through Georgia*, marched uptown taking the liberated men with us. Coming to the Davis House kept by R. A. Davis, afterwards Premier of Manitoba for a year or so, the soldiers made for the bar, where the bar-tender was ordered to set 'em up for the boys, which he did with cheerful alacrity, the proprietor looking ruefully on the while. After their thirst had been satisfied, the men again fell in and resumed their march up to the barracks.

Meanwhile word of our doings had reached headquarters, and when we were about halfway between the Davis House and the fort we were met by Colonel Jarvis, a couple or three officers, and the day patrol. The Colonel called a halt and proceeded to ask questions, but elicited no definite reply until he called on George Lee, our battalion drummer.

Lee, who was a giant in stature, standing six feet eight inches in his socks, had partaken rather freely, and answered that the force did not propose to allow any d ---- civilian to put one of our number in jail. One question led to another, and finally the Colonel, standing very straight, addressed George Lee thus: "Do you know that you are a mutinous fellow?" He then turned to the patrol with the command: "Place this man under arrest."

At this we shouted "No, Nol" Lee, stretching out his hand, patted the Colonel on the head, remarking jovially:

"You see, Colonel, your word don't go with this crowd. Come on boys." Whereupon we resumed our march, and arrived, singing, at the barracks.

You may imagine the feeling of rage and humiliation that possessed the Colonel, and the upshot was that shortly after our arrival at the fort; Lee was taken to the calaboose to be court-martialled next day.

That evening, while the place was in a state of ferment, Corporal John S., who had been drinking, took his Snider-Enfield from its place, slipped a cartridge into the chamber, walked outside his barrack-room, and without a word of warning, fired into the place where the men were passing and repassing. He was crazed for the time being, had a fancied grievance against an officer, thought he saw his enemy crossing the square, and let fly—with almost fatal results. He missed hitting any of the crowd, but the bullet passed through the side of the recreation-room (a mere

shell) and struck a soldier named Thompson, who was playing cards. He was rather badly hurt, the bullet passing near his lungs, but not injuring him fatally. At the hospital, Dr. Codd, the battalion physician, removed the bullet, and Thompson made a tardy recovery.

As may be imagined, this occurrence added to the general excitement of the afternoon, overshadowing it in dramatic and sinister importance. S. was placed under arrest, brought before the O.C., reduced to the ranks, and given a short term in the bastille.

Lee, our big drummer, got nothing but C.B. for a few days. The Colonel was a real sport, and very much liked and respected by the men. On the march from Thunder Bay to Shebandowan he carried his full kit, walking every foot of the way, and asking nothing of the men that he would not do himself (differing materially in this respect from the officers of the 60th) and the men would have liked him for that, if for nothing else.

Looking back, it seems to me that we young chaps ran things with a pretty high hand. And in so far as I was concerned, when I later joined the Manitoba Police, it often struck me as funny indeed that, whereas I was now sworn to assist in keeping law and order, only a year earlier I had been a law-breaker; and that now I lived in the station as a member of the force, whereas *then* I had marched in, and with an axe smashed the locks of the prison cells, for I was "The Man with the Axe"!

Perhaps fortunately, the Eastern press never got hold of a number of occurrences out there . . .

None the less, items from the eastern press show that the soldier boys' pranks in the West did not go entirely unnoticed. A despatch to the *Toronto Telegraph*, dated



February 18th, from Winnipeg *via* St. Cloud, speaks of the disturbance when the two prisoners were liberated. "Considerable alarm" was felt. Under Ottawa orders the volunteers were now "to be discharged on application, at the rate of six per week, till May 1st, when all will be disbanded, but two companies to serve six months longer, in view of the approaching elections." Disbandment just then was evidently regarded as dangerous.

The story of the wounding of Corporal Thompson formed the subject of another despatch, but the report emphasized that the men were now "quiet and sorry". Dr. Schultz, Manitoba hero and patriot, got up petitions praying that the Volunteers be not recalled, and though "uneasy at the recent conduct" of the soldiers, people rallied to their support.

Sir Sam Steele devotes a page of *Forty Years in Canada* to a somewhat less serious incident in which John also figured, and more openly. He has been relating his early troubles as a corporal. Several men, he says, "as bad as I have met", among the rough element of Company No. 7, were housed in the lower quarters, while the better spirits, including Kerr, were in the room above. Here is John's own account of the affair:

In barracks one day a man named Williams and I were cleaning the stove, fooling over it and sparring with the brushes. Joe Case, a member of our company, walked in from downstairs—part of our company was up, and part downstairs—and looked on, laughing, and clapping whenever Williams touched me with his brush.

Said I to Williams, "Wait, and I'll give Joe a taste."

Case ran away, but I caught him, gave him a little dab, and ran off, laughing.

I looked on it as fun, but Case didn't. He grabbed a big knife from among the tin dishes, and I, hearing them rattle, expected him to shy one at me, and stopped and ducked my head. Case drove the carving-knife through my leg, just at the knee, luckily missing the tendon. Seeing that he was in earnest, I flung the brush at him, hitting him in the face. He came for me; I seized the big poker, but, fortunately for me, hadn't time for a good swing before he was on me. However, I *did* give him a crack on the head. He threw up his hands, the knife flying up in the air, and toppled over. Had I had a really good swing with the poker, I might have finished him.

Corporal Steele had been watching the rumpus, and cried out:

"Now you've done it, Jack!" He didn't know that Case had stabbed me.

"I don't care," I choked, "the brute stabbed me." Then I fell on one of the beds.

The men from downstairs came rushing up and, not knowing that Case had knifed me, were for wreaking vengeance on me.

Steele had armed himself, and met the men with his rifle clubbed.

"This is for the first man that touches him!" he shouted, meaning me.

They drew back on finding that Case had been the aggressor, and went down the stairs. I was bleeding at a prodigious rate, when they took Joe and me to the hospital. The doctor sewed up my leg and Joe's head. An enquiry was held. Officers came and took down our statements. When I said I had hit Joe with the poker, Ensign Bell, who

was one of the officers present, remarked: "Served him right!"

Practically that was the end of it. We came out of the hospital on the same day, and were brought before the Cadi who addressed me:

"Your name is Case, is it?"

"No Sir," I explained, "my name is Kerr."

"Oh," he nodded, then turning to Joe, he asked, "What have you to say for yourself?"

"I was running after Kerr," declared Joe, "when he stopped, and the knife went into him."

"Well," announced the Colonel, "the *Case* is too big for me to handle. When I hear from Ottawa I'll let you know what's to be done to you. And you, Kerr," he added, "if you want to prosecute this man for assault with intent, I'll do all I can to assist you. Do you wish to prosecute?"

"No Sir," said I emphatically.

"Very well, then. Return to your duty, both of you, till I hear from Ottawa."

That was the last we ever heard of it. The report to Ottawa, so I believe, was just a bluff to frighten Case. Shall I say "All's well that ends well"?

Life was not all soldier-skirmishes or dare-devil pranks. Fort Garry hummed with military activity. In late February and early March of 1871, John Kerr's garrison duties were varied by another call upon his capabilities, and a fresh association that greatly influenced his future life. Lieutenant W. F. Butler, whose services to the North-West Territories had become well-nigh invaluable, had but just returned from that long tour of the western plains which brought forth his book, *The Great Lone Land*. Governor Archibald had commissioned Butler to report upon the

ravages of smallpox among the various Indian tribes. This dire disease, traced to one stolen buffalo-robe, and spread by countless others, had felled a huge proportion of the native red men.

On Butler's return to Fort Garry, he was quartered downtown, "as were also," according to John, "Captain Scott and Lieutenant McDonald. I became Butler's batman, and I had the care of his four-dog train. Lieut. Butler told me many tales of the far West and the Plains Indians and buffalo-hunting."

John's imagination was instantly fired, and his resolve to venture into the far West dates from this period of his service. It is not hard to picture him exercising the dogs since made famous by Butler's travel-tales. His vivid Irish colouring heightened by the snowy background, his lithe figure tugging at the harness as the husky brutes worked off their superfluous energy, John came to regard this daily duty as a relaxation:

The only dog whose name I now remember was Muskeymote. I used to hitch them up tandem (the regular way), and two abreast, double tandem—or, if you like, four-in-hand—and run them out to Silver Heights, Hon. James McKay's place, six miles away. It was on one of these spins that I first made Mr. McKay's acquaintance.

In *The Wild North Land* Butler tells of one of this pack, Cerf-Vola, who journeyed in boats, stage-coaches and trains, and stayed at hotels. Muskeymote, who lingered longest in John's affectionate memory, was a younger animal and, Butler says, "had not attained that degree of wisdom which induces older dogs to drag the icicles from

their toes", thereby avoiding sore and bleeding feet. Consequently he had to be booted every morning, a "cold operation" which gave his master much trouble. Once Muskeymote ate his boots, which were made of leather, when Butler forgot to remove them at night. Aloof at first, this dog became over-exuberant on better acquaintance, which may explain the impression left on John's mind.

A most useful report on the smallpox and on general western conditions, was turned in by the indefatigable Lieutenant on March 10, 1871. After that "in a shorter space of time than it took to traverse the length of the Saskatchewan", Butler was in war-shattered Paris.

Towards its close, the year 1871 was noted in despatches from Red River as having been exceptionally cold, but even the most frigid season must eventually yield to the spring sun. Soon thereafter scores of young soldiers—John Kerr among them—were keeping a weather-eye on the calendar, as April hastened to its end.

"After serving my country for one year, receiving forty cents per day and rations, I got my discharge on May 1st, 1871, and scrip for one hundred and sixty acres of land," so John wrote long afterwards, with vivid recollections of those first hours of release and bewilderment.

## CHAPTER VIII

### A FENIAN FIASCO

**A**N infant settlement is no more restful in temperament than a human baby. It is subject to infantile disorders, and given to spreading surprises and alarms among those identified with it. Growing pains are often its portion. Fort Garry, now Winnipeg, was no exception to this rule, and the press of the period records a list of its discomforts in the spring of '71.

Colds and influenza prevailed to a notable degree, the weather was inclement, mails were irregular, food was dear. The raw settlement groaned under all its unsatisfied needs, and wearied of its swaddling clothes. Finally, it broke out in a veritable rash of political dissension. Yet Red River had now become Manitoba, and a sturdy young province it was destined to be.

St. Boniface was incorporated in mid-April. About the same time a bill regulating the police force was introduced, and attention was directed to road-making. Grumbling tales to the effect that Manitoba settlers were flocking into Minnesota were hotly denied. Immigration, in fact, increased by leaps and bounds. By the middle of June the roads "were covered" by in-comers, well-equipped. By September the erection of a new church, the opening of a Hudson's Bay general store, sittings of the court, public

meetings, boat arrivals, and an energetic building boom gave to the community quite an urban air.

Unfortunately, as the year wore on, jealousies developed between French and English half-breeds, Indian enmities awoke, and negotiations for Indian Treaties became a popular demand. As August closed, about one hundred and fifty claims were filed for insurrection losses. Three major problems were mentioned again and again in the press—the volunteers, land-grabbing, and the lack of surveys.

"Volunteers to be taken home by the government, will not leave till June," it was announced, "as they go by the Winnipeg River route, and Lake Winnipeg is not sufficiently free of ice to permit boats to pass till the first week in June." However, during May discharged soldiers were already passing through, some of them "dissatisfied", and "some of the more needy of them had sold their claims for fifty dollars to land sharks" from the eastern cities. Volunteers and newcomers were under vast disadvantages in consequence of the lack of surveys. They had to play a waiting game; and the soldiers, unsettled by their sudden freedom, were occasionally guilty of lawlessness. Finally, it was noted on June 10th:

Volunteers, one hundred and ninety in all, have gone. The men of the 2nd (Quebec) Battalion left on the 7th, and the 1st (Ontario) Battalion left to-day amid the cheers of a large number assembled at Fort Garry to see them off. The batch to-day left in two brigades of boats, four in each. They are to be accompanied by Mr. Graham, an officer of the Board of Works, as far as Thunder Bay.

And so departed many of the young spirits who had been at once the problem and the protection of the new province. But others remained, and Manitoba, wisely, managed to merge her perplexities by matching some of the soldiers against the labours of surveying and road-making.

John Kerr was one of the lads who worked in a survey party that toiled early and late in the interests of the equally hard-working pioneers. He relates how one of his chums, returning with him to the new settlement after a short absence on the roads, remarked apropos of the immense growth in population: "Jack, I can see city in every one of those twinkling lights."

Just as a more tranquil period seemed to have dawned, and prosperity was well on the way, a new anxiety assailed the settlers. Six hundred Fenians were said to be on the war-path, headed for Fort Garry, with General O'Neil in command. The month was October, that golden month in the West, and as John puts it:

The Fenians, under O'Donoghue, attempted a raid from Fort Pembina, some sixty miles to the south of Fort Garry, and volunteers were called for. At the time I was working on the survey with a Mr. Johnston, D.L.S., our camp being on the road between Pembina and Fort Garry.

When we were told the news by men passing, two of us—a man named Farmer and myself—left the surveying-party, tramped to Fort Garry, and joined up under Captain W. N. Kennedy. I was given stripes, and put in charge of one of the small cannon formerly owned by the Hudson's Bay Company. We started that afternoon in a drizzle, and made camp about eight miles from Fort Garry.



During the night word came that the attempted raid had been nipped in the bud by the American authorities, so we returned to Fort Garry next day.

Actually that was all there was to it. In his old age John's ire was frequently aroused by writers who turned this Fenian farce into a gory combat. When it was noted in an obituary of one of his old buddies that "a medal and two clasps" had been bestowed upon the subject of the article for his services in this campaign, John's love of accuracy exploded in a spirit of sarcasm:

He did not fight, none of us did, in 1871, when O'Donoghue *et al* started trouble near Pembina. General Miles and the American troops squashed them.<sup>1</sup> I was in that *wonderful engagement*. We went eight or ten miles up the banks of the Red, camped, (it was raining cats and dogs), and next morning we turned about and marched back to Fort Garry! We were not within fifty miles of Pembina. I rode the horse, a black one, that hauled the cannon up the slippery southern bank of the Assiniboine River, and had charge of it.

Though the alarm felt by the settlers now seems somewhat disproportionate to actual attempts made in the West by the Fenians, these marauders had a strong numerical

<sup>1</sup> In a circumstantial account of the Fenian aggression, Hon. Gilbert McMicken names a British Colonel, Lloyd Wheaton, Captain of the 20th U.S. Infantry, in command at Fort Pembina, as the officer to whom credit is due.

On October 5th, Wheaton reported: "I have captured and now hold 'General' J. O'Neil, 'General' Thomas Curley, and 'Colonel' J. J. Donnelly. I think further anxiety regarding a Fenian invasion of Manitoba unnecessary."—From *Proceedings of Manitoba Historical and Scientific Society*.

backing, and their habit of keeping their intended victims guessing was one of their trump cards. No one knew where or when they might strike next. From early October to the end of 1871, no bulletin from the West omitted a reference to Fenian designs, or to the preparations being made to strengthen the defences of the new province. "All able-bodied men," to quote one of these, "in Manitoba are under arms—five hundred volunteers."

An Ottawa despatch of October, 1871, dealt with plans to establish military districts in Manitoba and British Columbia. Militiamen were to be sent out from the East—a force composed of skeleton companies from each military district. Accordingly troops brigaded at Collingwood embarked on a second Red River expedition on October 21st. Ottawa assigned fourteen days to their passage by the Dawson route. It would appear, however, that "frequent snow-storms" delayed them and they did not reach Winnipeg until November 18th. Loud cheers heralded their advent. One company was later stationed near Pembina, another at the Lower Fort.

Meanwhile, the full story of the fizzled-out raid filtered into Fort Garry through the lips of travellers. It was confirmed that the Fenians had never advanced much beyond Pembina. Irritated and over-strained by the threat to their progress, the English and French elements of the Manitoban population were shortly at loggerheads. Conflicting stories spread through the settlement. The French had lagged far behind the English in volunteering, though formerly known as the "loyal French stock". It was even said that Riel and Lépine had offered their services with a hundred men, when just an hour earlier the men had been

paraded to help the Fenian cause, and Governor Archibald's attitude towards these advances came in for contradictory comment. General political unrest led to a lack of confidence in the government, and anger against the rebels flamed anew. Early December saw an unsuccessful attempt to capture Riel and Lépine, "which has not resulted in scaring either of the Frenchmen; they will not be taken without bloodshed". The more thoughtful voted the Fenian scare a blessing in disguise, as it revealed the truly loyal in the population.

John Kerr had returned to his pioneer labours. In spite of early frosts and political uncertainty, the infant capital grew apace. Wagons, grumbling under their heavy freight, thronged the roads after ice tied up travel on the steamboats. Telegraph poles sprang up as by magic; on November 21st the connections were completed, and Governor Archibald and Lord Lisgar exchanged telegrams.

It was a stimulating era, and a stimulating climate. The bitter cold of late fall and blankets of snow soon reduced road work to a minimum. John, strong of arm and thirsty for adventure, shouldered his kit and marched upon Winnipeg, gravitating naturally to the body of police known as the Manitoba Constabulary.

## CHAPTER IX

### POLICING UNDER DE PLAINVAL

THE Manitoba Constabulary or, as John Kerr frequently terms it, the Manitoba Mounted Police, had been called into being by the exigencies of the unprotected settlement a year or more before John joined its ranks. The names of the original body of twenty men furnish a sort of glossary of Manitoba pioneer life. A few were drawn from the civilian population, but the majority had entered Manitoba with the two volunteer battalions of the Wolseley expedition.

The first officer commanding this civil police force was Captain F. Villiers, quartermaster of the 2nd Quebec Battalion and prior to that riding-master with the 13th Hussars. He drilled the young chaps in his charge with care and precision, turning them out as expert cavalrymen. The command had passed from his hands into those of M. le Vicomte Louis Frasse de Plainval, sergeant in the 2nd Quebec Battalion, before John Kerr donned the uniform of the Force.

There was surrounding this Captain de Plainval a romantic aura which completely captured John's imagination. He was said to have been an officer in the army of France, and to have left his native land as the result of a duel. After his discharge at Fort Garry, on May 1st, 1871,

he not only took part in the defence measures of the settlement, but he also brought to its social affairs talents that would have graced a far larger and more exacting community. He had toured with an operatic company and was no stranger to the footlights. Still under thirty, possessed of a handsome face and a tall, distinguished figure, de Plainval commanded one other advantage, which set him on a pinnacle in John's estimation—a ringing baritone voice. John could never resist the lure of a strong, well-modulated, true and dulcet human voice.

John Kerr's first duties, after he donned his new uniform, were discharged at the Stone Fort where the Québec Battalion had wintered in 1870-71. Those three-foot-thick limestone walls had housed the great annual meetings of the Hudson's Bay Company in the earlier half of the nineteenth century, sheltered the loyalists in 1869, and witnessed the first western Indian Treaty in August, 1871. The substantial pile had now become Rupert's Land penitentiary and jail, Colonel Sam L. Bedson, warden. John was a guard or turnkey, and states concisely:

I disliked the work. The head turnkey was a man named Hall, a former member of the first Red River expedition. He was a petty tyrant, who made life almost unbearable for the prisoners. His work got under my skin, for I always had a certain amount of sympathy for the "under dog". After two or three differences with him, I sent up an application to Attorney-General Clarke (the then Premier of Manitoba) for a transfer to the Winnipeg headquarters.

Premier Clarke had been a fellow lodger of John's in the town, and their relations were friendly, so the youthful

turnkey, awaited hopefully the result of his petition. Meanwhile he passed what he describes as "my strangest Christmas". He came off duty at midnight on Christmas Eve, mounted to the attic where the guards slept, and aroused his two friends:

Valentine Christian, a fine upstanding and good-looking young Irishman, lately out from the Ould Sod, and W. R. Prosser (Lieutenant Prosser, if you please, late of Her Majesty's Royal Navy) who was also a recent arrival.

Shaking Christian by the shoulder, I cried, "Wake up, Vall! Merry Christmas! Let's begin the day right, with a round or two with the gloves."

Up he got, pulling the gloves out from under his cot. I stripped off. Prosser held the watch, and at it we went. At first I had a little the better of it, though he was the bigger man and admirably proportioned; but later he came at me like a *carcajou*, and before I knew it I was looking at the roof. I got to my feet, sparred a bit, and it was give and take, till Prosser tapped the floor. Then we all tumbled into bed.

At 6:30, as the young men were eating breakfast, it became all too apparent that inroads were to be made into their prospective holiday. A desperado named Jim Warren, out on parole, had half killed a man at a dance some distance up the river. There being no one else to spare, Christian and John were detailed to arrest the miscreant. The message simply read: "Come and get him".

Warren had returned to the home of his employer, and lay in a drunken stupor on a lounge. The two guards entered, John slipped the bracelets on the offender and then clapped him on the shoulder, saying, "There's a man named Hall wants to see you".

"I'll *haul* you one in the face," shouted Warren, suiting the action to the word by kicking viciously at John's head. Had he not ducked with the utmost dexterity, the Perth lad would have ~~been~~ <sup>known</sup> no more that day. But the infuriated man was finally bundled into a cutter by the two guards, driven to the Stone Fort and safely locked in one of the cells.

Accompanied by Prosser, the two young fellows now joined forces with four of the Hudson's Bay employees, procured a sleigh and drove up the river to church. On their return to the fort a strange sight awaited them. Half a hundred Indians had come up the Red River from Lake Winnipeg during the night, had pitched their tepees outside the walls of the fort, and were being served by the Hudson's Bay Company with a fine supply of provender. It seemed that this was a custom of the factor at Christmas time, and Christian and John looked on with some amazement as the red men prepared for a big feast.

Their own holiday dinner in process of digestion, the policemen drove off to a dance, returning late in the evening to find that "there was hell to pay" at the scene of the mid-day celebrations. Dancing, gambling, food and rum, had set the entire party of Indians in an uproar.

Sticks and knives were being freely used, necessitating still another trip by Lieut. Prosser for the doctor, while Christian and I arrested a couple of the more violent of the natives, and rushed them into the pen. The Indians continued to feast, gamble, and pound the tom-tom till dawn of December 26th.

Up the two flights of stairs to the attic climbed the guards. Exhausted? No.

We chinned awhile, had another bout with the gloves, and then turned in, having had a pretty full day—and rather a strange sort of Christmas.

Soon afterwards John got his order transferring him to Winnipeg. His relief arrived next day, and he returned to the town.

Our quarters were in the old police station on the west side of Main Street. The Captain's rooms were above, and reached by an outside stairway. The lower front was occupied by the men, the prisoners' cells were in the rear, and, back of them, the cook house—all under one roof. So our quarters were somewhat cramped.

From these central offices the affairs of the Force for the whole province were administered; the duties of John and his comrades "extended over all Manitoba". The City of Winnipeg police force evolved from this early organization, which lost its identity as a mounted body, about 1873-4, when the North-West Mounted Police took over.

Captain de Plainval furnished the dynamic energy which set all the wires humming. John observed him with the liveliest interest. The young volunteer of Crystal Palace days, who had thrilled under the spell of Sallie Holman's play-acting, missed nothing of the histrionic charm of de Plainval.

He was a big man, about six feet, three or four inches, well-built and powerful, dark-complexioned, with long pointed moustache and imperial. He was finely-proportioned, but [truth must be served!] slightly knock-kneed, which was not apparent when he wore long trousers—more so in riding-boots and breeches, which he mostly wore.



A picture of the Vicomte de Plainval, clad in a jaunty fur-trimmed jacket over military togs, his black lamb-skin cap set at an angle on his wavy hair, fully bears out John's personal recollections. He leans lightly with one hand upon a carven cabinet, in the other he holds a cigarette; he stands on a fur rug, his weight upon the left leg, the right negligently thrown in front of it. Altogether a dramatic and intriguing figure, well qualified as a hero of romance.

The mounts of the Force were a fair lot, the best horse one we called Whiteface. After the spring thaw, an Indian prisoner escaped one day about noon, and made for the river. I ran to the stable, mounted Whiteface bareback, and got after him, but he had too good a start, and was out in a canoe paddling like mad for the other shore when I got to the Red. You see, he had friends who had the thing planned. I rode back and when I came to the creek (it was dry) I gave Whiteface a dig in the ribs, and over he sailed like a bird.

De Plainval saw me, came over, and began to call me down. He didn't know of the escape until I told him, when he cooled off. That was a big jump—more than twenty feet I should say—and I was proud of the way Whiteface and I sailed over.

A despatch of February 10th, 1872, to the *Toronto Globe* noted a petition in the Manitoba Legislature for the incorporation of the City of Winnipeg, but the new capital was by no means a restful community. Constant reversion to the unhappy subject of the Scott murder, open opposition to Governor Archibald, suspicion attaching to the erratic movements of Riel and Lépine, discontent over the awards in the matter of rebellion losses—kept the political

pot in a ferment; while difficult transportation, delays in settlement, and cases of personal enmity, added to the list of irritations.

The streets of the town were sometimes quiet enough, and patrolling policemen seemed almost a superfluity. Again, under the influence of drink, sudden brawls would flare up, and the constabulary had all it could do to control them.

De Plainval, who had always directed the musical efforts of the community, still found time during the quieter periods to indulge his *penchant* for choral singing and the drama. *The Manitoban*, Winnipeg's local weekly, has this to say of one of his performances:

Mr. S. Blanchard's singing was most effective, and was surpassed only by Lieut. de Plainval, who always brings down the house. The duet by Messrs. de Plainval and Blanchard was the gem of the evening, and had to be repeated. We must say that Mr. de Plainval's aria from *La Grande Duchesse* was a masterpiece of singing, and was received with great applause.

One dark and chilly evening de Plainval was abroad in the straggling streets of the town. He had a problem to solve. His newly-formed Amateur Dramatic Club was putting on a play, and he had not been able to decide on a song for the opening chorus. On the same evening John Kerr was patrolling the streets, and finding them quiet—and sadly dull. As he proceeded along Main Street, about midway between the fort and the police station, he passed his old boarding-house, kept by a Mrs. Munro. Seven or eight of his former fellow-boarders were grouped about

the organ carolling lustily, Sedley Blanchard's rich baritone in the lead. It was too much for John. Mrs. Munro had given him *carte blanche* to come in and sing and strum on her organ any evening that he was free. He cast hurried glances to north and south. All seemed well, so he succumbed, and joined the vocal exercises with his friends. Time passed—half an hour—an hour. Now John himself sat at the organ, and the chorus of Stephen Foster's *Hard Times Come Again No More* was wafted beyond the confines of the house into the night air.

'Tis the song, the sigh of the weary,

Hard times, hard times, come again no more!

Many days you have lingered around the cabin door—

O hard times come again no more!

Suddenly a hand was laid on John's shoulder, and a voice said, "Play that again!" John and the singers obliged, and the newcomer (none other than de Plainval) announced:

"That will be the opening chorus for our play."

John turned uneasily. The situation was more dramatic than de Plainval knew. The chief of police had found one of his men, supposedly on street duty, amusing himself withindoors. The young policeman slipped away and resumed his beat, thankful to find that all was quiet. For an hour he tramped the town, sensing again and again that touch on his shoulder, and exulting in the thought of having so neatly filled the Captain's need. Finally, he returned to the police station to warm himself by the stove. The place was quiet; the men asleep. Midnight had struck.

At this juncture in came Mackenzie, one of our Force. "Hello!" I exclaimed. "What are you doing out at this time of night?"

"I'm on in your place," replied Mackenzie.

"What!" I roared. "On in my place? The hell you are! What do you mean?"

"Just what I said," Mac sweetly explained. "There was a row up the street. They whistled and whistled for you, but you were nowhere to be found—so I had to take your place. There's a couple of chaps in the calaboose."

"Oh well," I yawned, "if *you're* on, I might as well turn in"—which I did, and slept till morning, when, on consulting the slate, I found my name down for an interview with the Chief, for being absent from duty without leave.

Up I went to the Captain's room, made my salute, and toed the mark. De Plainval gave me a mild reprimand, winding up by saying, "The fact is, Kerr, you're not doing yourself justice, playing at police work. You could be better engaged." He then returned me to duty.

Mid-March 1872 saw the mercury dive to 29° below. Spring glanced over the horizon, shivered and withdrew.

~~In April trotting races were held, and the first cab made~~ its appearance on Winnipeg thoroughfares. During the same month Captain de Plainval's 30th birthday was signalized, according to *The Manitoban*, by the presentation of a watch and chain from the members of the Force, with whom he was undoubtedly popular.

Spring now summoned all her courage, and broke through the hard shell of winter. Melting roads became marshes, navigation opened and grew difficult, and again a rush of settlers filled every nook and cranny of the

available accommodation. A Minnesota stage company talked of putting on coaches to the North-West Angle. A despatch to the *Toronto Globe* in late spring complained that "too many clerks and bookkeepers were coming in", and that there was "room only for working-men"! Two more parties of discharged volunteers left for the East by the Dawson route. Early June saw the first preparations for the forthcoming Dominion elections. The Manitoba Provincial Police apparently had a hand in the publicity programme; for John's duties included a trip to Pembina to post election notices along the way.

Others of the Force took notices west, east and north. I had to have the placards up that afternoon—so off I rode on Whiteface, my favourite animal. I was to commandeer horses along the route.

It was a nice warm day, and I made good progress for nearly fifty miles, when the pony I was riding—my fourth mount—began to lag. I had neither spurs nor whip, so I kicked and kicked, but the cayuse did not respond, just shuffled along slowly, and by and by came down to a walk. It was getting along in the afternoon, and Pembina still six miles or so away. There wasn't a house in sight at which I could change horses. In a sort of despair I began to whistle. Pretty soon I gladly noticed that the pony was quickening his gait, and gathered up the reins, chirping to him persuasively. He merely fell back to a walk! Again I threw my leg over and sat sideways, and once more started whistling, and again the horse quickened his step.

"Now," said I to myself, "I wonder if it's the whistling that makes him do that?" So I stopped whistling, the horse slowed down; I started it again, again the little beggar braced up.

"If that's your game," said I, "here goes!" I kept up the good work, and Mister Horse broke into a little canter, and so, whistling and cantering, we came to Pembina. I got my placards up, went over the line to the American fort and had something to eat. The sojer boys had a hearty laugh when I told them the story. Next morning some of them came over to see the horse, and christened him, The Music Box. He was just an Indian pony belonging to a settler living on the Red River, but—well, he knew good whistling when he heard it!

This mission was one of the last services performed by John before he doffed the uniform of the Force. The Captain's kindly advice had re-directed John's attention to the fascination of Lieutenant Butler's tales of the far prairies and the free life of the roaming bands of Indians and half-breeds. "You have gone West," urged the Spirit of Adventure, "but you have not gone far enough West. What about life on the plains? What about the buffalo, and painted savages, and rearing horses?"

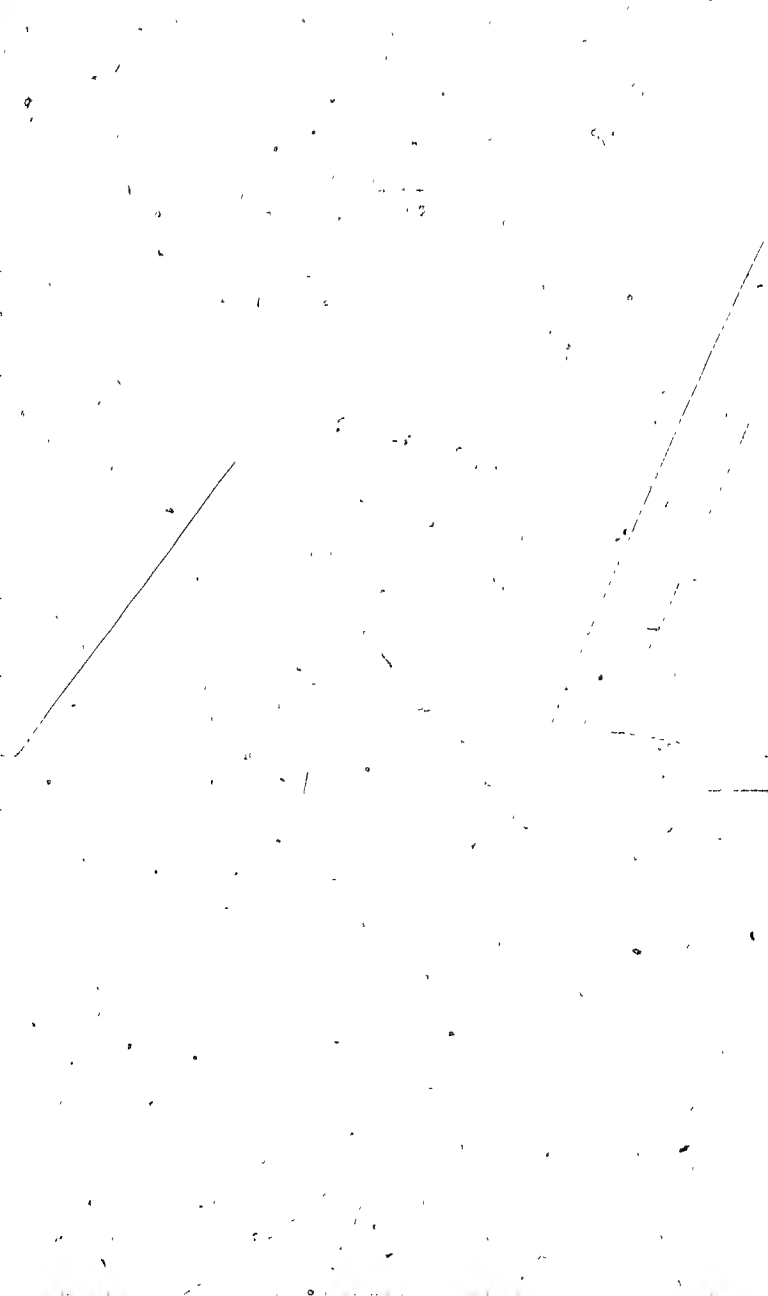
Sometimes John took from its sheath the hunting-knife presented him by his blacksmith friend in Perth. As luck would have it, the tales of the hunt which drifted into Fort Garry (as it was still frequently called) were more alluring than ever that year. "Buffaloes in the Saskatchewan country are very numerous, and an exceedingly profitable winter hunt is expected;" so ran a despatch of March 11th. Later, in full confirmation, a report of May 21st noted the "continual arrival of plains hunters with unusually large quantities of robes and furs, all of which are commanding extraordinarily high prices."

John's old buddy, Charlie Bell, shared this new urge towards prairie adventure; and the two boys met in excited discussion while their plans were maturing. A certain fluidity pervaded all western life in those early days. Fresh opportunities, new centres of population, drew the restless young settlers from phase to phase of enterprise and endeavour. Valentine Christian, after a period of police service in the capital, became secretary to Governor Archibald, resigning, it was said, because of an unrequited love-affair (possibly mere pioneer gossip!) to go out to British Columbia in 1873. He appears once more, under amusing circumstances, in John's recollections, but any searcher of old files is certain to come across his name. John's successor at the Stone Fort, a genial lad named O'Connor, shortly revolted against the conditions there, and was in turn drafted to the Winnipeg station, where he and John engaged in many a friendly scuffle before they went their separate ways.

De Plainval himself soon returned to the footlights. He toured the United States and Canada with his own company, which dispensed light opera and romantic drama with notable success. When it appeared in Manitoba in the late seventies, de Plainval did not forget his old friends, and John was among the lucky recipients of complimentary tickets for the Winnipeg performances.

SECTION II  
HUNTER AND ADVENTURER





CHAPTER X  
WITH GABRIEL DUMONT

IT seemed only yesterday that Charlie Bell and John Kerr had sat on the steps of the Winnipeg police station planning a trek to the plains. Yet here they were, plunging into "pastures new" with a party of half-breed hunters and traders. There were ten or twelve families of French *Métis* and a couple of English-speaking half-breeds in the band, which also included two Canadians named Todd and Ritter. Summer was at full tide. John was now twenty-one years of age, his comrade was eighteen. Anything could happen.

Along the well-worn trail from Fort Garry—three deep ruts carved by two wheels and a pony—creaked the forty or fifty Red River carts of the company.

Oh, those carts! Rough, hand-fashioned from racks to shafts, not a nail used in their construction! They weren't things of beauty, but they did the business for which they were intended. If a felloe cracked, a piece of green or well soaked buffalo-hide was bound around it, and held fast with shaganappi. When allowed to dry, this was as good as an iron rim until it wore out with long use. The upper part of the cart was not-boxed in, but was made of spars with rounded ends, over which buffalo-hides were stretched to keep off the rain. Some of the carts had strong grey

cotton covers, laid upon hoops, fastened to this rack; and these vehicles were used chiefly by women and children. About eight hundred pounds constituted a load.

Our journey from Winnipeg as far as the South Saskatchewan took approximately a month. Counting Sundays, when we didn't travel, and delays of one kind and another, we averaged about eighteen miles a day from the Red to the Saskatchewan. Water was a prime consideration. Some days we went thirty miles or more; on others not more than ten.

Early morning saw the camp astir, the women getting breakfast, the men rounding up the ponies. We had two or three oxen which left before sunrise, often before dawn. They would travel till it became too hot, then they would lie up until late afternoon, often making camp only during the night. As the wheels' hubs had no bushing, and the axles were seldom greased, the screeching of a long train of carts can be better imagined than described. The chorus performed by several ox-carts creeping into camp after nightfall was certainly not "music in the sinner's ear", especially if you happened to be one of those sinners who appreciated melody! On a still night, the discord, like no other sound on earth, carried easily for a mile or more according to the size of the train.

At the South Branch, as it was called, we were joined by a number of half-breeds from the mission of St. Laurent, three or four miles up stream, among them Gabriel Dumont, who was to become my staunch friend.

While the party tarried on the South Saskatchewan, a difference arose between the two pals of Red River days. Not a difference in the sense of a quarrel, but simply a divergence in taste between two opinionated young adven-

turers. Perhaps the strong geographical bent seen later in Dr. C. N. Bell, was already operative; at any rate he could not resist the lure of the "great lone land" to the west, and he elected to join a portion of the party which was headed for far-off Saddle Lake. John, on the contrary, more influenced by people than by places, had fallen again—call him a hero-worshipper, if you will!—under the spell of a personality, and he decided to make St. Laurent his headquarters, and to join the band of hunters under Gabriel Dumont. Todd and Ritter also remained in the party; and Louis Marion, a French half-breed trader (with his family) threw in his lot with the three Canadians. Little did the two Perth lads dream that they were at the final parting of the ways.

Building a couple of shacks on the banks of the river at St. Laurent, this small coterie was again divided, Ritter and Todd remaining at the settlement; and John, with Marion, joining the hunt.

John never attempted to deny the fact that the powerful personality of Gabriel Dumont, chief of the *Métis* plains hunters, became a major influence in his life at that date. The young soldier-policeman was not alone in feeling the crude, but overwhelming, mastery of the future rebel. Over broad stretches of the prairie Dumont's word was practically law.

We two, Marion and I, struck up a friendship that lasted for many a year. At first both of us slept in Gabriel Dumont's tent. It was through the intimacy thereby engendered, during that fall and the succeeding year, that I grew to know and respect the redoubtable Gabriel—chief outstanding figure of the plains. To me he was kindness itself.

He adopted me into his family, and never called me by the name bestowed upon me by the rest of his band, namely *le Petit Canada*, (*Petit* referred to my age, for I had height) but invariably addressed me as *mon frère*, while his family and relatives called me son, nephew, cousin, and so forth, and I spoke to them in similar terms. Dumont has been painted in lurid colours as a savage, brutal man. He was anything but that, kindly and generous to a degree. He had his faults. But who has not?

Marion, spoke English, French and Cree. Gabriel couldn't talk English, and so it came about that I just had to learn to talk French and Cree in order to make known my wants. I was the only white man in the whole camp, nor did I see another until my return to our winter quarters.

So—I was off to the hunt! And my first sensations? Well, you've heard the phrase, "hungry as a hunter". That was me. I was plain famished for, at first, I couldn't eat the food provided and after three days of fasting, while we were doing twenty-five miles a day out to the hunting-grounds, I was painfully empty. That evening the half-breed woman, wife to one Isidore C., who cooked for Gabriel and Louis, mixed some flour to make pancakes.

Now, thought I, I'll have something I can eat! But, when I saw the half-cooked, slithery mess she made, I just turned my back to the tent, leaned against a cartwheel—and cried! Louis came out and saw me, and asked: "What's the matter, Jack?"

I told him straight. "Why," said he, "take all the flour you want [you see, I had no grub of my own] and cook it to your liking."

I needed no second bidding, you can bet; I hadn't been cook to our officers of No. 7 Company for nothing! I got busy and made some flapjacks that would make a hungry

man's mouth water. The others watched me and ate some, and after that, when they wanted flapjacks, it was *le Petit Canada* who made them. All the same I wasn't long with them before I could eat almost anything. "Hunger is the best sauce."

Soon came John's introduction to the singular top-heavy beasts of the plains, whose existence spelled life (food, shelter, warmth) to the red man and his half-breed brother. This animal captured the imagination not only of plains hunters, but of scientists and historians; and the immense numbers in which the buffalo then roamed the prairies seemed no less remarkable to John than their sudden complete extinction within the same decade.

Year in and year out for centuries, these lands had been hunted over by various tribes of Indians: at this date the warlike Blackfoot whose main habitat was in the neighbourhood of the Bow River and its tributaries; Plains Crees and Wood Crees (most numerous of all) who occupied that territory ceded to the government of Canada in treaties consummated at Forts Carlton and Pitt in 1876; the Sarcee, Piegan and Blood Indians, chiefly in the Edmonton district; and the Plains Sioux around Fort Ellice, their main trading-post.

In October, the herds of bison began their leisurely march towards the wooded section of the country, near the foot-hills of the Rockies; and what a sight it was to see a drove of thousands moving majestically a few steps, then pausing for a mouthful or two of grass—another few paces, another mouthful, and so on—always travelling in the one direction. When spring came in the following year, they would turn tail on the wooded areas, and make again for the open prairie.

The joys of the hunt! Soon I was to learn its routine. A sort of rhythm pervaded it. The vast plains teemed with herds of *les animaux*, as my half-breed friends called them, or as the Crees named them, *Mus-toos-wuk*. The captain for the day would give the order for a run; you'd saddle your mount, parade out in a slow canter till a convenient mound or hill hid the hunters from their quarry, dismount to offer a short prayer, remount and await the captain's word to "let loose"—sure, then it was every man for himself, a quick rush on the unsuspecting herd, each hunter singling out his particular animal.

Crack! Crack! went the guns; or, if Indians were in the group, you'd hear the twang of bow-string and the hiss of the arrow, as it sped to and found its mark. Now the grunt of the buffalo as he toppled headlong! (If his wound was not mortal care was needed, for a wounded buffalo was a dangerous animal.) Then on after another, and another, till you had enough, or your horse was tired.

Then, back you would ride to your kill, dismount, spread the fallen monarch. Out would come the razor-sharp knife, and in an incredibly short time the beast would be skinned, cut up, and ready for the carts that had been driven on the field by the women-folk. And back to camp you'd go.

There were dangers, for wounded animals might turn on you, or your horse step into a badger hole and tumble you out of your little running-saddle. But the hunter is blind to danger in the excitement of the chase.

A very slight cause would set a whole herd of the animals on the stampede—a fearsome sight—turning the whole landscape, in the twinkling of an eye, into an undulating sea of backs. The noise of hoofs cracking, of horns crashing, would soon be lost in a thunderous pounding of feet. In the summer months, the sound was a hollow

rumble; in the fall of the year, when the ground was frozen, it had more of a staccato quality. Woe befell any living thing in the path of a stampeding herd of seventy-five or one hundred thousand buffaloes. Darkness seemed to increase the strange fear that possessed the animals in their mad panics, an uncanny fear that would repay a present-day student of mass psychology. On they would go, lunging and plunging, till, through sheer exhaustion, they would come to a standstill, panting, their tongues lolling out, flanks heaving, eyes wild and bloodshot.

On the prairie it was buffalo, first, last, and all the time. The very games and amusements depended upon the animal, for a big green buffalo skin that had been pegged and allowed to dry was used for a dancing-floor, and a splendid one it made. Oh, they were a jolly, happy lot! And how they could foot it, those *Métis*, both boys and girls. A poor dancer was a rarity. Around the little fires they would gather for this sport, and there was one fiddler in particular who was a "crackerjack" with the bow. I used to play the bones with him. I had made a set out of buffalo-ribs (of course!) and the first time I played with Baptiste, the dancers were much amused. But afterwards they'd call out:

*"Holà, Petit Canadal Allons!"*

And I'd come along with the bones. I never could dance, but enjoyed watching the others in their cutting-out jigs and step-dancing. Everyone wore moccasins, of course.

After the day's work, some of us young chaps would have wrestling matches, trials of strength in various ways, foot-races, horse-races, stunts on horseback. From some of the tents would come the sound of singing, mostly sacred music, though sometimes rollicking choruses, like *Le Fils du Roi*. From other tents the voices of women crooning a



low, sweet melody in Cree. It was surely sweet to hear. The missionaries, both Protestant and Catholic, had translated many hymns into the Indian tongue; and the converts were taught to sing them in their own language. A favourite hymn of the Catholic *Métis* from St. Laurent was the *Tantum Ergo*, sung in Cree; and well they sang it.

So—it was a happy life, especially when buffalo were plentiful. I never knew a more contented community. They were good to me, and as long as I live, I'll remember them with a kindly regard.

Walking through our camp one evening, I stopped to speak with a man I knew, who was sitting outside his tent smoking. I was barefoot, hadn't, at the time, a pair of moccasins to my name. His wife came out, spoke a few words with her man, looked at my feet—then, without another word, entered the tent, and brought out a lovely pair of beaded moccasins and shyly handed them to me. And I had never even spoken to the woman before. I did appreciate it, and became very friendly with the pair of them.

The *Métis* were misunderstood from the first, and especially after the '85 Rebellion. Many white Canadians would have experienced a change of heart if they could have been brought into as close touch with these people as I was, during my life on the plains.

## CHAPTER XI

### "BEATEN BY A SQUAW!"

THE concrete is much more in John Kerr's line than generalities; it is not, therefore, surprising that his next story of plains life is a vivid cross section of prairie events.

In a few weeks *le Petit Canada* had so far overcome his difficulties as the only white youth in Gabriel Dumont's band that he had well-nigh become blood-brother to the rest. He formed a partnership with Ambroise Fisher, a married French half-breed, who shared with him all the fortunes of the hunt. It was the custom of the band to hunt in pairs.

The weather during that summer of 1872 seems to have furnished some remarkable contrasts. Now early autumn was in the air, and one of those red-hot drouths, not uncommon at that season, stifled the denizens of the plains. The hunters were camped beside a lakelet known as "the big slough". All the smaller watercourses or pools were completely dried up.

A man could stick an arrow down the open earth fissures to its full length. Hot! I should say so. Day after day the sun blazed upon the parched ground, burning the short grass to the colour of an old worn-out moccasin.

Animals and birds, great and small, collected in increasing numbers near the slough, which covered but half its springtime area.

Little *Père* André, who often accompanied the St. Laurent *Métis* to their hunting-grounds, had prayed for rain at Mass that Sunday morning, and the hunters "kept looking at the sky". One of them, nicknamed Caw-Caw, noted for his remarkable eyesight, was the first to decide that what looked like a shimmering heat-haze in the distance was in reality a prairie fire. Regardless of age or sex, every member of the band turned out, formed a line, and started a back-fire at some distance from the camp. A fringe of blackened terrain soon separated them from the advancing flame, which moved slowly in the still air, but, "even so, was an awesome sight".

Buffalo in vast numbers came lumbering along to the slough, as did a few black bears and antelope. Kit-foxes, badgers and prairie dogs sought their holes; coyotes sneaked past, making for safety.

Nearer and nearer came the fire, miles wide, till only a mile distant at the nearest point. In front of the advancing flames, hurrying as quickly as they could, came a small band of Indians. They couldn't move fast, hampered as they were by a number of papooses, and a couple of old people, besides a young buck lying on a *travois* pulled by a dog, a huge cross-bred brute which trotted along, making light of his burden. The young chap's pony had put his foot in a badger-hole a few days before, and the rider had been pitched headlong on to his shoulder, putting it out of joint; his wife's courage is the subject of my story.

Suddenly the good father's prayer was answered, and before the flames reached our back-fired line, down came

the rain! For two-and-a-half days it fell in torrents. The earth fissures closed as by magic, the little ponds filled up, the big slough enlarged its boundaries, and the prairie, even where burned black by fire or brown by sun, became green again as an emerald.

Ambroise and I, like a good many of the other hunters, had been sleeping under our carts. Now we were forced to erect our tent, splashing around barefoot, heedless of the snakes which, drowned out of their holes, slithered past us in all directions.

As the regular camp operations were suspended, the tom-tom was pounded almost incessantly in some of the tents where the Indian gambling game was in full swing. Nearly all the camp, both natives and half-breeds, gambled. Quarrels broke out frequently, and the knife came into play on some occasions, but, though some nasty cuts were given among the Crees, no one was killed. Quite often I took a hand in the game in both Cree and half-breed tents, sometimes to my loss, but often to my gain.

On the day after the rain ceased, some of the *Métis* and myself were concluding a game which had lasted all night in the tent of the young Cree brave who had hurt his shoulder, when a dispute arose between him and a tall, strapping buck as to the division of the spoil. The dispute developed into a fierce wrangle, and, as far as I could judge, the injured brave was in the right.

Gabriel Dumont, his cousin Jean (*Petit Jean*, we called him), myself, and a half-breed named Poitras, had taken part in the game, along with half-a-dozen Crees. The big buck grabbed all the stuff in dispute, mostly pigtail tobacco; the injured chap tried to interfere, but the other knocked him down, hurting his sore shoulder.

In an instant the injured man's squaw barred the fellow's way, with a gun in her hand. Her eyes were blazing.

"*Atim*," she cried, "*Atim O Chisk!* You dirty dog! You hurt my man! I'll kill you!" Then, raising the gun, "Put down that stuff!"

The big fellow tried to argue, but she would not listen.

"*Nemoial*!" she shrilled. "*Nemoial Nol*!" He tried to pass, and up came the gun to her shoulder. Seeing that she meant business, he dropped the stuff. Had he not done so, I believe she surely would have shot him.

Then *Petit Jean* stepped up and got the disputants each to state his claim. The young brave's version was corroborated by a couple of Crees who had taken part in the game. *Petit Jean* made the division accordingly, and the matter ended.

Next day we moved and pulled up beside a smaller slough where we made camp, intending to run the buffalo on the morrow. Night came, we made our corral, drove in our ponies, set the watch (of which I was one), and soon all was quietness. About midnight we let the fires go out. The moon was full and just coming out of her hiding-place, flooding the prairie with a light that was nearly as bright as day. Very early we pulled out three or four carts, and let the horses free for a good feed and rest before the run. Most of them were foot-loose, but many of the runners were hobbled. Another guard and myself quietly herded them towards the slough for a drink, then let them go.

I saw a fine big broncho hopping along, a pinto-coloured fellow, and remarked to my companion.

"There's a good runner, if ever I saw one. Whose is it? I never noticed him before. And, look!" I cried, "there comes our sick brave's squaw leading another beauty. Where the devil has she been? She must have been out all night."

Past us she came, leading a dust-coloured pony by a short horsehair rope. I couldn't take my eyes off that mare, for she was as fine a specimen of horseflesh as one would wish to see—buckskin in colour, with a black streak along her back from her withers to her tail.

When morning really broke all was bustle in the camp getting ready for the day's run. I was surprised to see the injured Indian's squaw lined up on the buckskin, with a gun across her knees. She had discarded her shawl and was clad simply in shirt, loin cloth, leggings and beaded moccasins, a powder horn and bullet bag were slung over her shoulder, and as the braves were dressed somewhat similarly, she might easily have been mistaken for a buck. To complete the picture, the Cree who had had the quarrel with her the evening before, was not far away, astride the pinto we had seen early in the morning. I looked from one to the other, but their faces were utterly impassive, and they sat their mounts with ease and grace.

The buffalo had moved farther from the camp than we had anticipated, and were three or four miles distant. A goodly number of hunters were lined up and, as the plain was very level, the captain took us around the slough some distance to the right, in order to take advantage of a couple of small hills that would give us some cover. If the buffalo had got sight of us at any distance, it would have been a long chase to come up with them—a buffalo can *run*, and going down hill he can beat a horse. Those big shoulders aid him in a descent, but on the other hand, a horse can gain upon the buffalo when ascending.

In the shelter of the hill the half-breeds, as usual, dismounted to say a short prayer. Most of the Crees and other Indians sat their ponies, though a few got down and joined

the *Métis*, among them the lady who had threatened to shoot the day before.

Then all rode over the hill, the captain gave the word, "Let loose!" and away we went. Near to Ambroise and myself, rode the Indian huntress. I watched to see how she carried herself, and was more than surprised to witness her dexterity in singling out a fat cow and tumbling her over; but that was the last I saw of her, for I had work of my own to do, and besides she soon outdistanced me for her mount was much faster than mine. In the kill she accounted for three, while I had only one to my credit, and Ambroise, two. All in all, it was a good run, and the prairie was soon dotted with men and women skinning and cutting up the meat.

That evening the conversation turned upon the part taken by the squaw in the hunt, Isidore Dumont saying that she was the first Indian woman he had ever seen actually joining in the run.

"She has a very fast runner," I said. "There's nothing else as fast in the whole camp—unless the big pinto that the Cree owns."

Said Gabriel, "There are several horses just as fast."

"Whose are they?" I asked.

"I've got two myself," he insisted, "that can beat that mare!"

I laughed and shook my head. Ambroise sided with me, and the others were divided between my view and Gabriel's.

"What'll you bet, *mon frère*?" asked Gabriel, half-jokingly.

"I've nothing to bet," said I, "that's worth while, but if the injured Cree will let the mare run, I'll put up a bag of fine grease pemmican."

"It's a bargain!" declared Gabriel.

So over we went to the chap's wigwam, and asked him if he would let his mare run. He looked at his squaw, who laughed and nodded. And the race was set for next day.

Word got around the camp and others wanted to take part, among them the owner of the big pinto. Half a dozen horses were entered, and the camp was in a fever of excitement, for they were great gamblers, those plains hunters. Bets were made on every side, and a good few agreed with me.

But who would ride the sick man's mare? His squaw said that she would, but the other riders didn't want to engage in a race with a squaw. However, she stuck to her guns, said the mare was hers, and that if she wasn't allowed to ride the mare wouldn't run, so finally the others agreed.

That evening my partner and I concluded that the race would be between the pinto and the buckskin, and next morning Ambroise bet another sack of pemmican with Gabriel that they would come in one, two. The morning broke clear, and about noon the whole camp gathered at the course which had been stepped off the evening before, a straightaway mile as near as they could make it.

Gabriel being too heavy, his horses were ridden by *Petit Jean* and *Eli Dumont*. (Eli and Isidore were Gabriel's brothers.) The Indian owner of the pinto rode his own horse; the squaw sat on the mare; Pierre Parenteau rode his own horse, as also did the owner of the remaining animal. The six faced the starter who was to drop his red kerchief. At the end, all sorts of stuff was piled up by the parties wagering. The crowd lined the course at various points, but mainly at the finishing post. Two carts were set opposite each other, and two lodge poles fastened to them, and a line, a thin strip of shaganappi, strung across from the poles.



Like all the rest I was much excited, and could not help showing it, differing from the Indians, who sat stoically smoking, their excitement concealed. They had backed the pinto and the buckskin, to a man. We watched the start, and some of us who were mounted, jumped alongside and raced to the finish. As Ambroise and I had predicted, the race resolved itself into a contest between the pinto and the buckskin; my judgment was sustained, for the latter, admirably ridden by her owner the squaw, landed a winner by a comfortable margin, the pinto coming in second, and the rest, as they say in racing slang, nowhere.

Gabriel and the other *Métis* didn't hear the last of it for a long time. "Beaten by a squaw!" was often thrown at them. However, they took their medicine with a grin. Ambroise and I gave our winnings to the squaw. Added to their own meat, these more than filled their cart. She was offered a good trade for her horse, but refused. Had the pinto been ridden by a lighter man the result might have been different, for the brave outweighed the squaw by thirty pounds, which is a big handicap, but, like her, he refused to let anyone else ride his horse.

Even at this point the lady does not entirely disappear from my narrative, for I cannot forget an occasion when she sat her buckskin mare, with the utmost sang-froid, while a battle was waged between an infuriated buffalo bull and the enormous dog which had accompanied her family on their advent into our midst. It was the same dog which had pulled her injured brave on the *travois*, the largest dog but one that I have ever seen; and the fight which ensued was the talk of the camp for days. The bison's nose was badly torn; the dog was merely shaken.

This intrepid Indian huntress had all the courage of a

man. But, as will shortly appear, there is a cold-blooded quality in many squaws, particularly as age advances.

A severe hailstorm followed upon the events just recorded, and more or less upset our camp life, just as preparations were being made for a return to the settlements. Ambroise and I, our carts already loaded, were somewhat at loose ends, and one day we jogged along on horseback into a distant grove in a locality hitherto unknown to us.

A terrific din met our ears, weird yells mingled with the beat of the tom-tom. We dismounted, leading our horses. Near the centre of the grove in a large clearing bordered by a dozen or so tepees, we saw a band of Indians gathered about a tall post. Four or five ropes of shaganappi were attached to it, a pointed iron hook fastened to the end of each rope. Squaws formed the outer circle of the crowd, coolly chanting and clapping their hands. Inside the enclosure naked warriors danced, and younger Indians (mere boys) worked themselves into a state of frenzy, rushing upon the hooks and impaling themselves in the most ghastly manner. One poor boy lay on the ground, a pitiable object. This was the Sun Dance, in which adolescent Indians proved themselves as braves.

Ambroise and I, sick at the sight, marched up to an old chief, who was directing the affair, and demanded that the ceremony cease. He became abusive, but we threatened to bring the *Métis* from our camp and arrest the entire band. Apparently they knew that the Sun Dance was frowned upon by the authorities, for they immediately began to break camp; but the women, in particular, made plain their hostility to us, and their desire that the inhuman practice should continue. As only the old chief could speak Cree,

we concluded that this was a tribe of strangers. Time proved that they had come from beyond the Edmonton district.

Next day our own camp was broken. Some of the hunters went to Wood Mountain, some to Qu'Appelle, others to the Battle River district; while the largest unit, including ourselves, returned to Fort Carlton and St. Laurent.

CHAPTER XII  
A STARVING CREE

ABOUT six weeks later, after a short stay "spent in getting a supply of wood cut for winter, and some work done around the shacks", John again went out with Dumont.

We were mainly men, with a very few half-breed women, in this party. I took a cart and a couple of horses. We were after the winter's supply of fresh meat, which always engaged the efforts of plainsmen after the first of November.

The buffalo were cut up, the meat being left to freeze on the ground, then loaded into the carts. Three or four days usually sufficed to fill the carts, and then, back to the settlement as fast as could be. If *les animaux* were scarce it took a longer time. Sometimes the herds were scattered, at others the droves numbered thousands. The robes were usually good during November, December, January and February; but by the first of March the fur began to bleach and drop off in patches.

The food problem was a constant anxiety to both Indians and half-breeds—pemmican the one ever-present item on the daily menu. Many's the bag of real pemmican I've helped to make, and an ugly mess it was, whether the berry pemmican, the soft or the hard, the latter being most

commonly used. The complicated process has been so often described that I refrain from a repetition of the steps in its production. When it finally cooled, it became as hard as a brick, had to be cut with an axe, and would keep good for years. To the hungry man it was a strong life-giving food; and for months at a stretch, the natives had nothing else. Many a dish of it have I eaten, though I confess I couldn't stomach it at first.

Of course there was other game besides buffalo. In the sections adjoining the foot-hills, the big-horns, as the Rocky Mountain sheep were called, were eagerly sought after, not only for their meat, which was extremely good, and provided a change, but also for the skins which were heavily coated with wool and made a warm covering.

Toll was also taken of the wildfowl that covered the lakes and sloughs; of the prairie chicken and sandhill cranes, whose flesh was delicious; and of the innumerable deer, antelope, musk-ox, bear—the last-mentioned a special delicacy. A juicy bear-steak with a half-inch of white fat encircling its rim, and done to a turn, makes a feast for any epicurean appetite. The first game animal we killed for food on my very first hunt was a big brown bear. He was lumbering away from a clump of bushes, and we rode after him, and, as luck would have it, I rode too close to Bruin; he wheeled and slapped at my horse, which was blind of one eye, tearing my leggings and leaving the mark of his claws on my pony's side.

Just then *Petit Jean* rode up on the other side, and put a ball in him. In less than no time those half-breeds had him skinned and cut up, and he provided a marvellous meal.

Sometimes the hunter had fairly to fight for his food with the denizens of the wild. Prairie wolves or coyotes were everywhere. The coyote is an accomplished ventrilo-

quist. You can't tell where he is. He may be half a mile away, or a hundred yards only, for you can merely guess where the sound comes from. You think he's away off, but on looking carefully around, there's Mr. Coyote sitting on his hunkers, with his head stuck up to the stars, yowling his ul-al-loo. The same with the kit-fox, with his short sharp bark—and maybe he can't smell meat, or anything good to eat!

When Louis Marion and I were on our way home to our shacks, having left the hunters, we camped one evening near a little stream. Louis had bought a barrel full of buffalo tongues, and had salted most of them. At night he would spread them out for a couple of hours on the grass.

This evening I had baked a nice pan of bannock. We had finished supper, and sat talking awhile. Finally, Louis gathered his tongues, and covered them securely in the cart, under which we lay down to sleep. Kit-foxes and coyotes galore were yowling and barking, so I suggested to Louis that I'd scare them off with my revolver. I took one crack at them, stuck my bannock under the bag that held my clothes (which also served me as a pillow), and went to sleep. Morning came in a jiffy. Up I got, prepared breakfast, and went to get my bannock. Gone, slick and clean! One of those kit-foxes or coyotes had shoved his paw under my pillow, and sneaked out my bannock—and that's how badly I frightened them! How mad I was, and how Louis laughed! The kit-fox is like the ordinary red fox, but very much smaller. The coyote is not much more than half the size of the wood wolf. Their fur is of little account.

Sure—sometimes we feasted, and sometimes we didn't. And often the sameness of the grub palled on us, though Nature seems to adapt the hunter's stomach to a constant intake of animal food.

It was very late in the fall when Louis Marion and I returned to our winter quarters. And shortly I made my first personal acquaintance with the difficulties of prairie budgeting. The stock of fresh meat which I had thought ample for the needs of Todd, Ritter and myself, dwindled much faster than I had expected. They had appetites like wolves, and my own ran theirs a dead heat. There came a time when we hungered so constantly for fresh food that we were finally reconciled to a taste of dog.

Yes, the lean days were upon us. So, notwithstanding an addition to our larder of half a small buck, which we got from an Indian for a little pigtail tobacco, our supply of fresh meat was down to a point where it behoved me to do some replenishing.

Neither of my mates was any good at that. What brought Todd and Ritter out West, I know not. They neither hunted nor traded. All winter they did nothing but eat, drink, smoke, chew and sleep. They were sociable fellows, but useless; and the entire burden fell on me.

I didn't mind. I liked being chief cook and bottle-washer. And I liked nothing better than to take my gun—or rather Todd's gun, for it was better than mine—and scour the woods and the upper banks of the river for game. My friends were saving our bacon for their return journey to Fort Garry in the spring. They had never taken kindly to pemmican. In the true sense of the word, they were tenderfeet.

Well, I had had poor luck for days, so I went off one afternoon, telling the boys I'd stay till I got something, if it took all night.

It was a bright winter's day, not extra cold, and down the river I tramped on my snowshoes. I had got a big jack-rabbit, and a half-dozen prairie chicken, when a bird flew

right over my head, and lighted on the tip-top of a tall dead poplar on the far side of the river. It was a lone, white, upstanding tree, which reflected the rays of the setting sun.

That bird looked so big, I said to myself: "You're my meat, if I can get close enough." So I laid down my rabbit and chickens, and made for the bank on the other side, where there was no timber to speak of. Closer and closer I went, my gun ready, should he fly across again. I got almost under the poplar, braced myself on my snowshoes (they are tricky things among fallen trees and branches) and took a pot shot at him.

When he plumped down into the snow, not three feet away, I dug out the biggest bird of the species it had ever been my lot to bag. With his head tucked into my belt, I went for my other game—and none too soon, for slinking down the bank were a couple of coyotes who whirled away into the woods at a shot from my gun.

The birds and my jack were some weight, but off I set on the five-mile tramp up the river to our shack. . . . About a mile on my way, from the heavily-wooded right bank of the river, came the sound of chopping. I turned, and came upon a water-hole cut in the ice a little way from the shore, and a track leading up from it into the woods. Curious as to the sound—for I knew no *Métis* living below our shanty—I followed the path through the bush, and was mightily surprised.

A clearing had been made in a clump of evergreens, and the lodge poles of an Indian tepee showed above the stunted bushes. Up among the timber a squaw was deftly chopping a dead poplar. She had not seen me.

"How! How!" I called.

Startled, she leaned heavily on the axe-handle. I couldn't speak well in Cree, but pointed to the tepee. She nodded,



and together we approached it. When she pulled back the flap of the tent, I went in and recognized the Indian with whom we had previously traded tobacco for our half of the deer aforementioned.

He was hugging the fire, his hands towards the little blaze, and shivering like a man with the ague. His cheek-bones stuck out, his hands were skin and bone. A tiny boy, and a girl scarcely more than a baby, sat near the fire; they too were peaked and thin. The squaw, perhaps twenty-three years of age, was comely and clean, but her features were drawn by want. In fact, all of them were starving as I soon learned. This was their story:

When the young buck passed our shack, weeks earlier, he was drawing on a flat-sled the carcass of a small deer. We traded some tobacco and tea for half of the deer and then he went on to St. Laurent, a mile up the river, intending to trade the other half for some flour.

But, as ill-luck would have it, he passed a hut where gambling was in progress. He listened, looked, and was lost; for the beat of the tom-tom no Indian could resist, and he sat himself down opposite Gabriel Dumont, who was waiting for an opposing *vis-à-vis*. For a short space he won, then luck turned, and Gabriel gathered in not only the tobacco the poor chap had got from us, but the other half of the deer as well.

Home went the Cree with an empty flat-sled, and an empty tobacco-pouch, to confront his squaw; then, taking his bow and arrows, he set out to hunt, but got only enough to keep the pot boiling for a few days.

Then poor Lo took sick and couldn't hunt. All supplies vanished, and here was the third day that they had had nothing at all. The man's condition was pitiable, the elder child sat quietly stoical, his coal-black eyes unnaturally

large. The baby was a sad object, while the squaw, though not so far gone as the rest, was pretty well "all in".

She was trying, with fair success, to lay in a stock of firewood, to last for a few days while she tramped to the Fort, sixteen miles away, dragging the flat-sled and the baby, in the hope of getting enough pemmican and other provisions from the Company to last a month or two.

Well—what else could I do? I flung down the jack and told the squaw to get it ready for the pot, and maybe she didn't! That rabbit was skinned, cut up, and in the copper pot on the coals, while you could say "knife". I skinned a chicken; we didn't pluck prairie chicken, I had learned that, when I cooked for a surveying party a couple of years before, and the squaw cut it up and put it in the pot with the rabbit.

I stayed till the mess was cooked, and the man had gulped down some of the broth, scalding hot. It revived him a little. The baby got broth, but the older kid and the squaw just played havoc with the meat. How they did eat! I turned to leave, but their eyes rested longingly on the other chickens; so I said to myself: "Pshaw! Let the hair go with the hide!", and yanked the rest of the birds from my belt, and tramped home empty-handed.

That night I went to St. Laurent, the *Métis* settlement, hunted up Gabriel, and told him the story, and he said to come back in the morning and he would see what could be done. So I smoked and talked with my next-door-neighbour, Louis Marion, till after midnight. Then across we went to Philip Guardepuy's tent, where again I related the tale of the starving Cree. . . . Poor Philip! A dupe of that rascal, Louis Riel, he took part in the rising of 1885, was arrested, tried, and given a term of years in Stony Mountain Penitentiary; seven, I think. Whether he served them out

or not, I don't know. A kindly-disposed, good-natured man he was, handsome too, bigger and better-proportioned than my friend, Louis Marion.

Next morning, Louis and I walked to the mission, and discussed the case with Gabriel. Louis suggested our visiting *Père André's* habitation, which was part of the log church, partitioned off. The priest questioned me till I was tired; for the good *curé* spoke only French, in which I was not proficient.

Finally I exclaimed to Louis, "Oh hell, let's go!" and started to walk away. To my amazement, a tall half-breed who had been listening attentively, suddenly attacked me. Now I *did* pride myself on my wrestling, so I soon had this chap, Basil, on his back, and was feeling for his windpipe. He almost dislodged me, but I was in the act of pasting him one, when a huge hand grabbed me by the collar, and lifted me bodily off. I wrenched free, and found Gabriel Dumont grinning at me! And then it came out that Basil had thought I had told the *priest* to go to hell! When the half-breed learned his mistake, he sheepishly held out his hand, which of course I took, and Gabriel remarked with a grin, as he, Louis and I set off for Dumont's house:

"Our brother is a wildcat, isn't he?"

"*C'est vrai*," agreed Louis.

Gabriel told his wife, Magdeleine, to get some meat from the storehouse. She was a fine comely woman, and people often wondered what she saw in such a homely chap as Gabriel—for he was homely. He looked older than his age which had barely reached the middle thirties, and had rough-hewn features, an ungainly figure, and a scraggly beard. He has been described as gigantic, which was untrue, as he was of medium height only, but possessed of uncanny muscular strength. Both his father, Ai-caw-pow,

and his uncle, Ska-kas-ta-ow, were much larger than he. In his own home Gabriel was never quarrelsome, and his wife and adopted daughter—he had no children of his own—never got an unkind word from him, so far as I ever knew or heard.

Well, Magdelcine grumbled, but she lugged in a leg of buffalo, weighing perhaps fifty pounds, and a half-sack of pemmican. We loaded it on a flat-sled. I suggested medicine to stop the sick Indian's chills—so back Gabriel went to the *curé*, and found him already packing a little medicine-case, and quite determined to accompany us.

So we caught a pony, hooked up the sled, and away we went.

Inside the Cree's wigwam, Gabriel turned to Louis and said:

"Why, I know this chap! He sat in a game with me a little while ago, and I won half a deer, and some other stuff from him." And that was how the Cree's story came to light.

Father André carefully mixed a bottle of medicine for the sick man, who was feeling a trifle easier. He looked gratefully after us, as we passed, one by one, under the flap of the tepee. Before leaving, I asked after the big chicken I had shot.

The squaw pointed to the pot, smiled and said, "*Mee-wa-sin*. Good."

And I'm dashed if they hadn't eaten everything I had given them the day before, except the little that was in the pot! Ah well, they were hungry, and well I know what it is to be without food for two or three days. I should certainly have liked to see that mammoth bird stuffed and mounted, but surely it went where it did more good, so I have no regrets.

Our man recovered slowly, and when able to travel, he took the splendid buffalo-robe that they used for bedding, and offered it first to *Père André*, who thanked him but declined it; then to Gabriel, who also declined with thanks. To me he gave, and I gratefully accepted, a beautifully embroidered pair of moccasins made from the skin of the buck he had sold to us.

I saw him next year, with the big camp on the plains, fat and contented. We greeted one another; and next day I saw his squaw talking to some others and pointing to me; so I judged she was relating the tale of the previous winter. For once I had the sensation of feeling downright virtuous!

## CHAPTER XIII

### THREE MEN OF NOTE

**T**HREE men, all of them closely identified with Canada's history, were, at the end of 1872 and in the opening weeks of 1873, located at three points forming a small geographical triangle, the base of which ran along the South Saskatchewan River from St. Laurent to The Forks. Map-lovers will identify The Forks as the confluence of the two great branches of the Saskatchewan. The apex of the triangle in question is the settlement of Prince Albert on the North Saskatchewan within fairly easy distance of The Forks.

Oddly enough, these three men were born in the same year, 1838.

Gabriel Dumont, a moving spirit in the rebellion of 1885, first saw the light in Manitoba, according to tradition, in 1838, though the exact date of his birth is unknown. Now, at thirty-four years of age, he was a sort of over-lord among the Indians and half-breeds, with headquarters at the Mission of St. Laurent and the near-by hamlet of Batoche.

Captain W. F. Butler, mentioned so frequently in this narrative, was born in Tipperary, Ireland, in October 1838. He wintered in a hut at The Forks before setting out in February 1873, for the Peace River district, on that great

exploratory mission pictured for us in *The Wild North Land*.

Charles Mair, trail-blazer in Canadian dramatic poetry, journalist, civil servant, pioneer and enthusiastic patriot, was born in the Ontario village of Lanark in September, 1838. During the winter of 1872-3, he kept a store at Prince Albert and was engaged in the fur-trade, but the range of his activities was limited only by the measure of his abounding energy.

Possibly these three contemporaries came into contact with each other. Dumont very probably was known to both Mair and Butler, while the two latter may never have met. But it is certain that John Kerr was in touch with all three of them, and this interlude in the recital of his plains life concerns that fact.

There is a satisfaction in viewing John's present surroundings through eyes more mature and critical than his own. Captain Butler had made a difficult journey to The Forks, *via* Prince Albert, during the last week of October 1872. He arrived there on the 30th of the month, to find that the two friends who had preceded him, had built a hut "for our residence during the early winter".

Butler and his companions lost no time in setting forth in quest of buffalo, though snow had fallen, by then, in many storms. Five days' journey brought them, he relates, to "a curious assemblage of half-breed hunters". He goes on to describe St. Laurent to the life, and it is beyond the realm of possibility that any other place is designated, though he does not name it. St. Laurent was about five days' journey up the South Saskatchewan from the Forks; it was always called "the mission", and in other

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particulars the cap exactly fits. A picture is painted of the huts crowded together, the horses, dogs, women and children; the hunters idle, lazy and drunk; the women drawing water and carrying wood; wolf skins and remnants and wrecks of buffalo lying everywhere, meat on stages, robes stretched and drying.

At dusk the glow of firelight from little huts through parchment windows, the sound of fiddle scraped with rough hunter-hand, and the quick thud of hunter heel as Louis, Batiste or Gabriel foot it ceaselessly on half-hewn floors. Unquestionably these French half-breeds are wild birds, hunters, drinkers, rovers, rascals, if you will—yet generous and hospitable withal.

After a delay of three days in this hunters' camp which by some strange anomaly was denominated *la mission*, its sole claim to that title being the residence of a French priest in the community, we started on our journey farther west.

It is to be hoped that the good *Père André* tried to dissuade Butler's half-breed helper from deserting him at St. Laurent, an act of cowardice, according to the Captain, who explains that this servant from Red River "dreaded the exposure of the plains". However, the party procured two new attendants, and three fresh horses, and pursued their course along the South Saskatchewan to the great prairie.

Butler agrees with other authorities as to the buffalo. "The previous year had been one of plenty. Buffalo had appeared in vast herds on the prairies of the Saskatchewan. Wolf skins, robes, and pemmican had fetched high prices." He links the red man to the bison, telling how a young



Sioux said to an American official, "The buffalo is our only friend. When he goes, all is over with the Dacotahs." As John has already noted, this was amply true. The red man's hut, boat, food, bed and covering, were derived from this creature; and, in death, the brave's body was swathed in the animal's dark skin.

It was early December 1872, before Captain Butler returned to his habitation at The Forks, having weathered intense cold (30° below zero) in a leather tent made of eight skins, which sheltered the party of five. They had reached the buffalo about the middle of November, when snow was already encroaching on the hunting-grounds between the South Saskatchewan and Eagle Hills.

We know that John was also abroad on the prairies at that period. It is unlikely that he saw Butler on this trip, but of another—unrecorded—journey made by the Captain and his companion at Christmas time, John has this to say:

In the Christmas season of 1872, when I was wintering near St. Laurent, Captain Butler popped into my shanty with a Captain Mansfield [referred to only as Captain M. in *The Wild North Land*] and had dinner with me. We had plum-duff, I remember. We had a jolly chat, and he and Mansfield left for Prince Albert. I went to Prince Albert myself, shortly afterward.

The mild observations made by John, in his story of the starving Cree, upon the subject of the Indian's alternate greed and want, are greatly enlarged by Captain Butler. During the "beautiful, sparkling weather with more intense cold" which accompanied the advent of the new year 1873, Butler's party, not too well supplied with provender them-

selves, were importuned by neighbouring Indians who were too lazy to hunt the deer for food:

An Indian never knocks at a door. He lifts the latch, enters quietly, shakes hands with everyone, and seats himself, without a word, upon the floor. You may be at breakfast, at dinner, or in bed, it doesn't matter. If food be not offered him, he will wait till the meal is finished, and then say that he has not eaten for so many hours. . . . Indians regard starvation as an ordinary event to be calculated upon, that as long as any food is to be obtained, it is to be eaten at all times, and that when it is gone—well then, the best thing is to do without it.

Near Prince Albert, in the month of February, Butler and Captain Mansfield parted, Mansfield "returning to Red River and Canada" and Butler "holding his way across the frozen continent to the Pacific". John's elation at meeting his erstwhile hero, now a military man of even keener spirit and more confident ability than before, may easily be imagined. Yet it is possible that there were homely qualities in the rough and rugged Gabriel Dumont—violent though he was at times—that appealed more to some vagabond, go-as-you-please streak in John.

It was at about the turn of the year, during the frigid spell noted by Butler, that John varied his hunting-trips on snowshoes by a more ambitious jaunt.

One cold, bitter cold, day at the close of '72 I was on my way, alone, from St. Laurent to Prince Albert, when night overtook me. I had missed the way. There was a clear moon, bright as day. Well, I ran into a small thicket, unhitched my cayuse, and kicked around in the snow for fuel. I hadn't even a pocket-knife, but, gathering twigs, I started

a fire, found some small logs, and soon had a blaze. Then I turned my flat-sled on its edge, and lay down, snuggled in a rug or plaid shawl that I had brought from the East. In my sleep I stuck my knee into the coals, burning a hole in the rug. My knee still bears a scar! Next morning I was joined by my *Métis* friend, Louis Marion, and we went on to Prince Albert. The thermometer registered 48° below zero.

At Prince Albert I stayed the night at the Church of England house, and the good lady there—I forget her name—kept telling me about Butler and Mansfield who had stopped there and what great appetites they had, and kept urging me to eat.

Good Lord, I could have eaten everything on the table; I was so hungry, but I was too bashful. However, after tea, I excused myself to run out and see to my horse, went to George McKay's, and found them just sitting down to supper. My comrade, Louis Marion, was there. Maybe I didn't make up for lost time! How I did gorge myself—bannocks, butter, potatoes, buffalo steak—Yum Yum!

Not all of John's interest was gastronomical during this short stay at Prince Albert which J. W. Tyrrell calls a "beautifully-situated town on the North Saskatchewan River", and Butler, "the little mission station midway between the Red River and the Rocky Mountains". In addition to seeing the sights, there was much work to do in a short space of time, and one "more or less intimate acquaintance" to renew. John surprised Charles Mair by walking in upon him. The poet, John's senior by more than twelve years, had been a schoolmate at the old grammar school in Perth, of John's brother William—a fine classical scholar—who, again, was more than a year older

than Mair. Natives of Lanark County are as brothers when meeting in a wilderness, and these two "enjoyed a long confab over old associations in Perth".

This conversation inspired an article on Charles Mair, some sixty-two years later, when John himself was a very old man. It was never offered for publication, but showed a close acquaintance with Mair's career, and a deep appreciation of his poetry.

In Ottawa, in 1868, while on a mission concerning the publication of *Dreamland and Other Poems*, Charles Mair was appointed to collect information in the matter of Hudson's Bay holdings in the West, and 1869 found him acting as paymaster on the government road eastward from Fort Garry. When trouble developed he became one of Riel's prisoners; escaped, and made his way east with Dr. Schultz, helping to rouse public opinion to the gravity of the situation.

On Mair's return to the West, his duties took him to Portage la Prairie, and then to Prince Albert, where John sought him out. The younger man was later impressed by Charles Mair's foresight in the matter of the troubles of 1885. From 1882 onwards, Mair—"in the truest sense", writes John, "a pioneer of the West"—vainly attempted to warn and advise the authorities. When rebellion finally struck, he enlisted; and in later years gave lavishly of his time and talent to the national cause.

## CHAPTER XIV

### GAMBLING FOR A WIFE

LOUIS MARION, John Kerr, and their respective cayuses were soon re-established at their former haunts near St. Laurent for the remainder of the winter.

John answers a question often asked: How did the *Métis* and Indians spend their time in winter quarters, waiting for the tardy but swift onrush of spring?

In gambling to begin with, for the Indians were born gamblers, and naturally the half-blood also. But I must add, the influence and teachings of the good fathers kept the half-breeds from the excesses of the natives, who sometimes gambled even their wives away!

These gambling games frequently lasted for two or more days without let-up, often ending in brawls. A particularly serious brawl I recollect was the outcome of a game that started with a couple on each side. As usual the players sat cross-legged on the ground, and the game of hiding and guessing went merrily on. The hider sang to the accompaniment of the tom-tom—very often a frying-pan struck with a stick—and as he waved his hands, he had the choice of the positions under the blanket in front of him, in which to hide the two differing objects employed in the game.

The minute the hider brought his hands from under the blanket, he smote his chest, contorted his body from the

hips up—while all the time the tom-tom kept up its rat-tat. And as the players grew excited, the noise increased, those on the side of the hider singing in unison with him. The leader of the other side had to guess the location of the objects under the blanket. A correct guess meant that all on his side won the gages put up by their opponents. An incorrect guess—and all on his side lost the articles they were staking. Those dropping in took one side or the other, and soon the din became fierce and ear-splitting.

The day the trouble took place, partisanship was at a high pitch, each side taunting and jeering at the other—there now being about a dozen on each side since the game had been going on for some hours. Suddenly two young bucks began to dispute about the value of a gage one of them had put up. I was sitting next the guesser, the man with the tom-tom was pounding away, keeping time with a shuffling step and singing, as were most of our opponents. It was part of the game to confuse the guesser by the noise.

All at once one of the two young chaps drew his knife and made a lunge at the other. Both sprang to their feet, and before you could say Jack Robinson they were at it like a couple of devils, stabbing and carving one another. It was dangerous to interfere, but they were finally separated, badly cut up. One died during the night; the other was not much use that season, though he eventually recovered.

If I live to be a hundred I could never forget that fight. They were both naked from the waist up, and their gory bodies were a horrible sight. The game broke up, nor was another started for days, though previously there had been at least one game going nearly every night. Gabriel Dumont was much given to gambling, especially during

the winter months, when he would be at it two or three days a week.

One evening, when I was a player, I noticed a tall, gaunt Indian watching the game for some time. I was the guesser-and-hider, and was winning.

He asked my opponent to let him take his place, and the change was made. I afterwards learned that this Indian was a noted gambler, but luck was against him that day. He would take the two objects—we used cartridge shells that day, one longer than the other—hide them, bring his closed fists from under the blanket, beat his chest and wriggle like one possessed. His chest gave forth a sound like a drum, as if it were hollow.

At first I was "rattled" and made poor guesses, but the tide turned, and I won steadily, as did, of course, all on my side. He was nettled that a white youngster should best him, and lost his nerve. (You must keep your wits at this game.) And finally he was cleaned out, got up and went off, coming back in about a quarter of an hour with his wife, or one of his wives, and offered to put her up against my pile of winnings.

Frankly, I couldn't see it. I said *Nemoia*, the Cree for No.

I had no use for a wife; hadn't a tent of my own even, and only a couple of horses and no cart. However, he insisted, and when I refused again he got rather nasty, but at last he took the woman away. I met him several times afterwards, but apparently he never forgave me.

What sort of a squaw was she? Well, she was like all the rest. You couldn't tell her age. They nearly all looked alike, though there was an odd good-looking one among them.

But Satan was not always finding "some mischief still for idle hands to do", for *Métis* hands were far from always being idle. About the middle of March, word arrived that a small band of buffalo had been seen on the other side of the south branch of the Saskatchewan, and as the scow, or ferry, at the Crossing, was on the far side of the river, which was full of running ice, the *Métis*, headed by Gabriel Dumont and Ambroise Fisher, set to work to make boats to cross in.

The *Métis* were nothing if not ingenious, and that passage over the Saskatchewan in full spring tide, with cakes of ice like big scows floating along, was a revelation to me.

They made rude boats by taking the wheels and axles off a couple of carts, placed end to end. Buffalo hides, previously well soaked in water and thus pliable, were stretched around the shafts and spindle-framed tops of the carts, to achieve a rough boat-shape. These they let dry in the sun, which tightened the skins. Then they spread tallow and axle grease all over the hides, applying it thickly where they were sewn together. And there you were!

Three or four rode in these makeshift boats; two to paddle, one to steer and one holding a rope, the other end of which was fastened to a horse's neck. Attached to this horse's tail was another horse, and so on, one behind the other.

We crossed in this fashion, and had to climb up the opposite bank over great piles of ice that had been flung up in some spots fifty or sixty feet high. The ponies showed wonderful intelligence in mounting these piles of ice; they would tap-tap with their forefeet to try the ice before venturing. In two or three instances it broke under their taps,



showing cracks several feet wide, and many feet deep. My respect for "horse sense" was not lessened by this display of sagacity.

Without mishap, eight of us made the crossing: Gabriel, Ambroise, five other *Métis* and myself. We quickly pitched our tents, and went to sleep. It rained during the night, but the morning broke clear and bright.

Led by the half-breed who had brought the word, we soon sighted the buffaloes, just seven in all. Three of our party gave chase and killed the seven. We camped there that night and next morning went down river to the Crossing, baled out the old scow, ferried across, and then home with enough fresh meat to feed the settlement for some days.

And so, closely allied to these fascinating people, I watched the dawn of what proved to be one of the most eventful years of my life—1873.

Before we left our winter haven there took place one of those contests most dear to the *Métis* heart, for horse-racing aroused both Indians and half-breeds to the highest pitch of enthusiasm.

Philip Guardepuy, who was later to suffer for acting in Riel's council, had spent the winter in a tent just across the way from Louis Marion and myself, and at that time he was the owner of a blaze-faced horse that was counted quite fast, while Baptiste Boyer owned a bay mare that could run. I saw the two race in the fall of '72, and the mare won. A match was forthwith made to be run the next spring for a goodly sum.

Philip had sent his horse to a friend in Prince Albert, who fed him grain and hay and exercised him all winter, and in the spring brought him back for the race. The mare had had the run of the prairie most of the winter, was

then brought in, fed and exercised; and on the appointed day the race was run.

It came off on the plain just above where Marion and I wintered. They measured off a straightaway mile on a beautiful sod course. The match had been talked of all winter, both at St. Laurent and Prince Albert, and all the neighbouring Indians were much in evidence. Betting was brisk. I caught the fever, and bet everything I had about me—tobacco, pipe, firebag, shirts, and even my pants and sash. The day was mild and sunshiny, and all the world was there.

The ~~new assistant~~ priest stood at the winning-post. Father André started them at the other end. Eli Dumont rode the blaze-face, as Philip was too heavy, weighing over two hundred pounds. Baptiste rode his own mare.

They lined up, the word was given, the mare got off a couple of jumps ahead—and sure, that *was* a race! Down they came, jump for jump. My heart was in my mouth. I had backed the mare, and every bound, it seemed to me, would bring the horse past her. But no—she flashed past the mark first, by just as much and no more than she gained in the breakaway. That race was the talk everywhere for most of the season.

Not only races and trials of skill led to betting. The gambling instinct provoked the plains hunters to wager on practically anything, even weather and events, and their hazardous mode of life encouraged the foolhardiest stunts.

## CHAPTER XV

### THE ROAD TO GREEN LAKE

WITH the advent of Spring 1873, Todd and Ritter (fortified no doubt by their hoard of bacon!) returned to Fort Garry, and John Kerr seemed more than ever part and parcel of the hunting fraternity.

Lawrence Clarke, the Hudson's Bay Company's factor at Fort Carlton, had made arrangements with Gabriel Dumont and the *Métis* at St. Laurent, to commence work early in the spring building a road from the other side of the North Saskatchewan, opposite Fort Carlton, to Green Lake. Butler describes this lake, possibly a hundred miles from Carlton, as a long, narrow sheet of water, of great depth, lying from north to south. He adds that about midway between Carlton and the southern tip of Green Lake, "the traveller crosses the height of land between the Saskatchewan and Beaver Rivers".

John joined the road-building party, "the one white man in a big gang".

Very early in the year we went over to the Fort, about twenty miles away, taking three or four carts and a few horses. We got supplies—tea, sugar, tobacco, pemmican, flour, axes, saws and other tools—crossed the river in a scow, taking only a couple of extra cart-horses, and leaving the buffalo-runners at large with the Hudson's Bay band of

horses till our return. As I was not exactly an expert axeman, I elected to do the cooking for our tent, in which was Ambroise Fisher, with whom I now entered into closer partnership, also Gabriel Dumont, *Petit Jean* Dumont, and four or five others.

Our rate of pay was \$3.00 a day which, considering the fact that these same men could earn in the hunt from \$10.00 to \$50.00 a day, was not too much; but I thought it pretty fair at the time. Gabriel was in charge, and naturally his pay was higher.

We made good headway on that road. Those half-breeds *did* work, believe me, and no short days either. We made bridges over several small streams and gullies, clearing a road twelve feet wide, burning the brush and piling the logs at the side of the road whence they could easily be hauled to the Fort for firewood. Some were big and straight enough to use for log houses, and I daresay were so used. There wasn't much timber on the east or southeast side of the river, but the other side was heavily wooded all the way down to, and below, Prince Albert.

As cook, I had to be up before daylight, and one morning shortly after I got the fire a-going, and a pot of "rub-a-boo" hanging over it, I thought I heard a sort of growling outside.

I looked out but could see nothing, so I returned to my job; again I heard the noise, and peeping out towards a cart that stood near the next tent about thirty feet away, I saw a big brown bear tearing away at a sack of pemmican.

I shook *Petit Jean*, who grabbed his gun and pulled the flap aside. Bang! came the report, and down clambered the huge beast. He lumbered off, snarling and limping. A chap from the other tent gave him his *coup de grâce*, and the resultant steak was a welcome change after a week or ten days of pemmican and sow-belly.

We finished the work called for and turned back. The streams over which we had built bridges had been overflowing when the work was in progress, but the water had gone down very rapidly. We had not cleared away the brush nor cut up the trees on the outward trip, but on our return we cleared and burnt as we went along.

Asked how much work had been accomplished by the *Métis* in the spring months, John replied that they probably cleared some fifteen or twenty miles, starting directly opposite Fort Carlton. Apparently more had not been expected from a band of half-breeds impatient to get out on the plains to hunt. "I presume," added John, "that the road was finished later, but I wasn't there."

One evening we came to one of the streams, in which the water had lowered considerably, leaving the bridge well above its muddy surface. After supper I strolled out on the bridge, looked over the railing, and remarked that it would be a nice place to dive from.

Some of the men laughed, and an old chap, partly blind, said:

"You wouldn't dare do it!"

"What'll you bet?" I asked.

"*Un louis*," said he.

"Done!" I replied, and the bet was made. I went to the tent, peeled off, and came out to the bridge. I waded out to test the depth, and was rather perturbed to find it was not up to my waist. The floor of the bridge was about twelve feet above the water, and the top rail four feet higher—no height to dive from in water eight feet deep, but with less than four feet!

Up I went on the bridge, stepped out on an extended log, and took a header. I just scraped the river bed, diving

along in the rapid muddy water till compelled to come up for air. The boys thought I had succumbed, and when I returned to the bridge most of them tried to dissuade me from taking the top rail plunge. They said I had won, but the old man cried "No!"

"All right then!" I yelled, and planting one foot on the top rail, leaning down as far as I could, not daring to stop to consider, I shot out, curving my back and shielding my head by my outstretched arms. Well that I did so, for my hands struck a stone at the bottom, and so saved my body though I received one nasty cut that rasped the flesh from my chest.

The curve I essayed did my back no good. I felt the effect for days. I never would have taken that second foolish dive, but that I wanted the five dollars badly—and the old rascal never paid me! My friends cheered the stunt, and afterwards in '76, while I was at Fort Carlton during the making of the Indian Treaties, some of the natives recalled me as "the man who jumped off the bridge".

It took about as long to clear away the branches, burn them, cut up logs and pile them, as it did cutting through the road. So one day when our diet was very sadly in need of variety, Gabriel said to me:

"I go seek some bear-meat, *mon frère*, will you come too?"

I jumped at the idea. So off we went, Gabriel, Moïse Parenteau and I. (Poor Moïse! Another of Riel's dupes in 1885, he was sentenced to a term in Stony Mountain.) We had gone about a mile, when a she-bear with a couple of big cubs trotting after her, made for the underbrush. While we waited in hiding, another animal lumbered after them.

Gabriel as usual took the lead and planned a manoeuvre which netted us bear-meat and to spare till we reached Fort

Carlton. We got all four bruins and I accounted for two of them.

They sent me to bring a horse and cart and a couple of men, Moïse and Gabriel remaining behind to skin the kill. *Le Petit Canada* was a proud boy that day. I got a cart horse, two *Métis*, and back we went. Soon we had all loaded into the cart, headed for camp, and arrived, amid loud acclaim, just as all the rest were knocking off for the day.

Some of that meat found its way to St. Laurent, to the old *Métis* left at home from the hunt, mainly through the thoughtfulness of the man who was later called, "that savage rebel, Gabriel Dumont"; for Gabriel entrusted to *Père André*, along with some articles for the "old folks at home", most of what remained of our kill. You suggest that it would be high by the time it reached them? It probably was; but the half-breed palate, tired of eternal pemmican, was not too fastidious.

While Gabriel was with the factor, Lawrence Clarke, arranging the settlement, and giving the names of his men, the rest of us strolled into the Company's warehouse. Spying a small cabinet-organ, I asked the storeman if I might use it. He nodded. The *Métis* gathered around while I played some of their hymns, and they sang in the Cree tongue. Mightily pleased they were. Then I warbled a bit myself, winding up with *The March of the Cameron Men*, in lusty style.

A sudden sound of clapping embarrassed me—and there stood Mr. Clarke and his daughter at the door! They even shook hands with me—all dirty as I was. Gabriel laughed and remarked:

"*C'est mon frère—un chanteur lui.*"

This same Miss Clarke afterwards married my very good friend, Sedley Blanchard, a barrister who could give me cards and spades in singing and then hold all over me.

The old Hudson's Bay store at Fort Carlton was perhaps a hundred feet long, with one end partitioned off to provide storage for hides, skins, robes, furs, pemmican and dried meat. The other part was fitted with shelves and a counter extending the full length of the store. Bacon, pork, flour, filled one end; while groceries and dry goods crowded the shelves.

We were paid off with due bills, and Hudson's Bay Company bills of several denominations—1 shilling, 2 shillings and sixpence, £1 and £5. Most of the *Métis* took their due bills out in trade. The counter was piled with miscellaneous articles, now being pulled hither and yon by curious half-breeds. The only clerk in the store was exasperatingly slow.

Impatient as usual, I finally pushed my way to the counter, crowding Big Basil to one side. He shoved me back with an offensive jest and I used some unparliamentary language. He cuffed my ear. I closed in on him, and shortly had him on his back. His head hit with a thud, and I got in a couple of good cracks before they pulled me off. It was as well for me that they kept us apart for Basil was a hefty chap, and a few wallops from his huge fists might have given me something to remember. However, though I was certainly in the wrong, this fracas produced the impression that I was ready to take my own part.

We were finally fitted out. I bought a horse and a cart, and some few necessities, and when all were ready, away we started for the plains to join others who had already left St. Laurent for the hunt.



Next day at noon, we came to a big slough, my cart being the rearmost in a chain of twenty. I noticed some of the men ahead of me riding into the slough, and stooping over.

"What are they doing?" I asked Ambroise.

"Gathering eggs," was the unlooked-for reply.

Eggs! Man alive, I was into that slough like a shot, on my new horse. I pulled off my shirt, tied knots in the sleeves, and in a twinkling had all the eggs I could carry. Nests, nests—duck-nests—no end to them, made of rushes and grass, and in each from four to a dozen eggs, *les oeufs*, the *Métis* called them. Back I went after another load. I never saw so many eggs at once at any other time; there were thousands of them. The air was black with ducks of every breed known in the North-West.

We had eggs for dinner. I'm really ashamed to tell how many I ate! We cooked them every way, nor did we come across many bad ones. We had them for a week, and I gathered and gathered, till Mrs. Ambroise, who had joined us at the Fort, said, "Don't bring any more!"

Those were the first eggs I had eaten for many a long day. I can truthfully say that I made up for lost time.

## CHAPTER XVI

### A NIGHT STAMPEDE

**T**HOUGH John Kerr never claimed to have an experience of the prairie unrivalled among white men, yet it must be admitted the elements treated him to some extraordinary shows in the matter of hail, drought, blizzards and thunderstorms. The peaceful plains themselves now put on a performance of another order, in this summer of '73, when they, and not the elements, staged another disturbance—a night stampede of buffalo, one of the most enormous known in the period of which John wrote. The story follows:

We were camped one night, after a long day of travel, not very far from a small stream, that meandered with many a hook and crook, on its way to the South Saskatchewan. There are very few of these coulees, once you leave the big rivers. The water in this particular creek had all but dried up, only a trickle remaining. Our camp was small—say, twenty-five tents of half-breed hunters, with half as many Cree tents pitched to one side.

We had about sixty carts among the plains hunters, not counting the few owned by the Crees; but neither band had as yet struck any buffalo. Late in the afternoon, our party (composed almost entirely of half-breeds) found this small band of Indians putting up their tepees and making ready

for the evening meal of dried meat and tea—and very little of either did they have. So, as we were well supplied, Gabriel, our headman, took over a half-sack of pemmican, and a bladder of fine grease, about ten pounds.

We camped some little distance from the natives, for obvious reasons, and to the right of their few tepees made our corral, turned loose our stock and put up some tents. A few hunters, including myself, spread blankets under the carts for the night's rest. I had no tent. If it rained, I usually slept in Gabriel's, which was a good deal larger than the one owned by my partner, Ambroise Fisher.

We had not yet joined up with the main body of hunters, so that our corral was small, in keeping with our numbers. We spent the evening chatting; a few of the young people danced cut-out jigs; some of the men repaired carts, harness or saddles; others looked over their lariats.

The nightly council was held, the captain for the next day appointed; and shortly after dark the ponies were driven within the corral, the watch set, and then to bed for the rest of us.

During a stroll through the Cree camp, I had noticed a rather good-looking young squaw outside a small tepee, with a tiny papoose at her breast. The baby's little black eyes stared at me with never a blink as it sucked mightily away. Out stepped a brave, her man, with the salutation "*How! How!*", and we shook hands. They had come from Fort Qu'Appelle, and so far had seen no buffalo.

The creek-bed curved sharply away from the Indian camp, which was about one hundred and fifty yards from the creek, and as many from our camp. Some of us gathered firewood along the banks of the stream, small limbs of scrub oak and white poplar. We hoarded our

wood, conserving our small stock by the use of buffalo chips.

By ten o'clock the camp was quiet. It's always "darkest before dawn", and who knows that better than the plains hunters, who lie night after night with no roof between them and "the spacious firmament on high"?

Dawn comes early on the great plains of the West. About two o'clock in the morning I was awakened by a call from Ambroise.

I turned over and grumbled, "What's the matter?"

"Get up, Jack. The buffalo are coming!" he yelled.

I felt like saying, "To hell with the buffalo. Let 'em come!" But as I listened I heard the distant rumbling of thousands upon thousands of hoofs pounding along, shaking the very earth.

That woke me up, you can bet! I scurried about, helping to take down the tents and tepees on the side nearest the Cree camp. The horses had been turned out of corral at the first sound of the stampede, and the fires poked into a blaze. We then ran out some carts between our corral and the Cree's camp.

The Indians had scurried for safety to the other side of the creek, leaving, as they thought, one empty cart; and in the semi-darkness and confusion, a cayuse had been left tied to one of its wheels. Now in that cart was a treasure that had been overlooked in the excitement. The young squaw thought her man had carried it to safety; he thought *she* had done that same thing. And so—

Nearer and nearer came the thud of the pounding hoofs. "The earth shook and trembled," as the Good Book says. Most of our party had betaken themselves, like the Crees, to the far side of the coulee; but a few of us stayed at the edge of the corral.

'Soon we made out the dark mass of half-crazed beasts thundering along, bearing straight towards us, with a front of about four hundred feet, as we saw by the hoof-prints next day. The hoarse, rasping breath of the labouring buffalo could be heard as nearer and yet nearer rushed the animals—horn cracking against horn. Had it been full daylight, the sight would have been magnificent. In the semi-dark it was terrifying.

Suddenly we heard a piercing shriek and out from among the Indians a squaw rushed to where the supposedly empty cart was standing. But a young Indian brave bounded past her, reached the cart, grabbed at the treasure (nothing less than their little papoose!), handed it to the squaw, and then tried to loosen the shaganappi rope that held a terrified cayuse tied to the cart-wheel.

The pony pulled back and tightened the knot that held the rope, thus hindering the Cree's efforts. He drew his knife and cut the rope. Back jerked the pony and made off. Round the bend came the buffalo, swerving at sight of the fires, not enough to avoid the Indian's cart, but just enough to enable the brave to gain the creek by the skin of his teeth, hard on the heels of his flying squaw.

Alas for the cayuse which was caught by the foremost of the bellowing herd, knocked down and trodden to a jelly. The sight sickened me, and the scream it gave lingers in my ears to this day. The cart too was smashed, and three buffaloes killed in the mix-up.

*Les animaux*, grunting painfully, swept by our camp without damage to it, thanks to the Indian cart and our fires, but if I live to be as old as Methuselah, I'll never forget that night. Judging from the herds I've seen by daylight, of which an approximate count could be made, there must have been not less than half a million in the

lot. Of course it was not yet light, but that was the estimate arrived at also by experienced hunters. The beasts slowed down and came to a stop a mile or two from our camp.

There was no more sleep for us that night, and the next day we had the devil of a time gathering our horses, a job that was not completed till evening, so we again camped for the night in the same place. The three buffalo were skinned and cut up, one given to the Indians, and the other two divided amongst our party. Gabriel came over, calling to me:

*"Allons, mon frère—allons manger!"*

He also invited Ambroise and his wife, but their own supper was ready and they declined. Off I went with Gabriel, and as we had eaten no fresh meat for two weeks, we had a sumptuous meal of buffalo ribs, roasted on the turning spit over a bed of buffalo-chip coals, the dropping juice and fat helping to keep the fire alive. It was cooked to a turn, plenty of good RED meat, as the *Métis* liked it. The odour from a fire of buffalo chips gave a flavour, all its own, to meat grilled over it—a little peculiar I admit, like nothing else on earth.

We never knew what started that stampede. . . . The Indians were left at the creek, but later that summer joined our camp which by then had grown to be a large one. I said I never would forget that night, but neither did that young squaw, I'll be bound. I can see her yet streaking for the safety zone, clutching her papoose in her arms, her man behind her. Don't ask how she was dressed. The least said, the better. Poor girl, in her frantic fear she turned nudist for the nonce—a real heroine, a red Lady Godiva, minus the horse! And her brave was almost similarly clad.

Next day I saw them, clothed and in their right minds, ruefully inspecting their smashed cart.

"You had a close shave." I managed to convey this in Cree. "You were lucky to save the baby."

She smiled and nodded.

"*Tap-way, tap-way!*" he agreed. "That's so, that's true."

When I saw them later in the summer, he had another cart and another horse, and grinned as he pointed to the papoose fastened to its board standing against the cartwheel.

His wife was all smiles, and more fully attired than during the stampede, but nothing to crow about, at that.

How and why did the buffalo disappear? What far spaces absorbed them? By 1878, hardly one was to be seen. The hunters picked out the young cows to kill, their meat being very tender, and this lessened reproduction. Some common sense and restraint might have saved the herds for a time.

Few indeed are the white men now living who hunted the wild bison on the western plains and fewer still those who have witnessed a genuine stampede.

## CHAPTER XVII

### THE TIN WHISTLE

IT is curious to note how great a gulf seemed to exist, even at that comparatively early period, between the half-breed and the genuine redskin. Many of John Kerr's associates of 1872-3 were not far removed from the pure Indian status, and yet their admixture of French or Scottish blood seemed to have worked a sort of miracle as to outlook, betterment and progress. In the various Indian tribes were found many stages of development from the starkly primitive up. In one letter John recorded his first impressions of the Sioux character—stern, secretive, proud and arrogant. The Blackfoot Indian appeared grave, ceremonious and dignified.

As we have seen, the Plains Crees were more commonly met with in conjunction with the *Métis* hunters. They were certainly of a more pliable disposition. Occasionally a Bungay Indian is mentioned, or a band of Chippewas, the latter being, in some localities, of a lower order of intelligence although much depended upon their habitat. It is significant that tribal customs such as the Sun Dance, with elements of barbarous cruelty, were even then confined to those aborigines who roamed beyond the fringes of on-rushing civilization. Considering that most of the savages were nomadic in their mode of life, the differing tribes



preserved their individual traits in a remarkable degree.

Following upon the glimpse of Indian nature in *A Night Stampede*, John now sketches for us some darker characteristics of the native red men. The background to his tale of cruelty, *The Tin Whistle*, sets off, in pleasing relief, the industry and kindliness of the *Métis*.

One sultry evening we arrived at the fording-place of a stream. Buffalo were reported in numbers twenty miles further on, and most of the band pushed ahead to camp near a big slough, leaving some of us to search for wood suitable for mending carts and making felloes and hubs.

Among those who remained were Ambroise, Philip Guardepuy, myself and a half-breed they called Caw-Caw, the Crow. He was almost as black as a negro, burly, but kind. Ambroise and the others wanted to repair their cart-wheels, so after I helped Philip and Caw-Caw to put up their tepees, they went for the wood and I stayed in camp to mend our harness.

I took my lariat, or long line, and set about making it more pliable by working grease into it. I was very proud of my line; it was an exceptionally good one, and I had become fairly expert at throwing the loop, though nothing like the broncho-busters of later years. It was a flat line, cut from the toughest part of a buffalo hide, even in width, soft and flexible as a whiplash. Sitting on my pony, I would let it trail from my hand as I jogged along. With a quick movement I could jerk it ahead, and make it snap like a pistol shot. It was useful in rounding up the horses.

Soon we hitched up and drove down the bank of the stream, loaded up, and returned to camp. Caw-Caw and Philip rolled some cartwheels into the water, and left them there to soak and swell up all night. Then we set to work

shaping up felloes and hubs. By the time they were partly roughed out, and supper was over, it was dark. The horses had been hobbled and turned loose.

Ambroise and I were sleeping under a cart. His wife had gone ahead with the other party. Pretty soon all was quiet.

I was awakened by a cry a little distance away. It was repeated.

I shook Ambroise, saying, "Did you hear that?"

"Yes. It's a coyote. Go to sleep."

"That was no coyote," said I.

Again came the cry, as of one in pain, followed by the snort of a horse, and the sound of hobbled horses jumping. We got up, but the sounds ceased. We could see nothing, but now and again we heard the little hippity-hop of the hobbled horses as they jumped from one feeding-place to another.

"Oh, I guess it was a coyote, all right," yawned my partner.

"Then what made the horses snort as if they were frightened?" I asked.

"Me, I don't know," said Ambroise. "Let's go back to bed."

Bright and early next morning the camp was astir. Breakfast over, Caw-Caw and I went for the ponies, each carrying his rope and light running-saddle, a home-made article of buffalo- or deer-skin, stuffed with the porous hair of the antelope.

Some distance away Caw-Caw grumbled, "Where are those d---d horses, anyway?"

"Round that bend, no doubt," said I, and sure enough, when we turned, there they were, about half a mile away, hopping and cropping.

Suddenly the Crow stopped, examining the ground leading to the woods. "There's been someone along here lately," mused he. "Looks as if someone lived near here. Let's go down and see." He led along what was at one time a beaten path. As we entered the wood, we heard a noise to the left.

The Crow, who was in the lead, cried out, "*Mon Dieu, mon Dieu!*" and stepped aside to let me see. A big brown bear was getting down on his four feet—he had been standing on his hind legs clawing at the bark of a white birch tree. I looked. My knees buckled under me, and down I flopped in a dead faint. Caw-Caw ran to the stream, carried back water in his cap, and sprinkled my face; then shook me till I came to. I sat up, but fell back again, sick at my stomach. After that I felt better, and got up.

We had come upon a raised Indian burying-place, in a clearing. It was like the first floor of a frame dwelling; only, instead of lumber, trees and branches were used. Larger trees were the uprights, smaller ones the sills and joists. On this platform, eight feet above ground, supple branches were interwoven and spread with buffalo robes. The corpses were wrapped in skins, laid on the platform, and left there surrounded by implements of the chase.

This particular platform was in bad repair. An end post had given way, and corpses were lying helter skelter on the ground. A young brave had been "buried" not so very long ago, and this gruesome sight had knocked me out. A dozen corpses were on the ground, and three or four times as many on the platform. The coyotes had created sad havoc among the remains. . . . Is it any wonder that my knees wobbled and my stomach turned?

Caw-Caw asked me to remain, while he went for the others.

"No *sir!*" I objected. "I'll go."

He said, "We'll both go."

Old Bruin had ambled off through the woods when he caught sight of us.

So we rounded up the horses, and returned to camp. The Crow told the story, the other two saddled up and went back with him. Not I! They set the facts before the council that evening, and next day a party repaired the burial platform, and replaced its grim relics.

When they returned I had the horses hooked up. Off we went, I on Ambroise's runner, and he on a cart-horse. The carts were lightly laden, so we shoved along at a good pace, the ponies being urged into a trot every little while. In an hour or more the camp, pitched on rising ground, loomed up.

As Philip and I rode along we noticed a squaw leading a pony, with a bundle on its back, and an Indian sitting sideways on that. Knowing that the Indians treated their women in many cases as beasts of burden, we didn't pay much attention. A dog with a *travois* of tepee-poles followed the pair. But suddenly we saw the Indian lean forward and strike the woman with his quirt. She gave a little cry, then ran a few steps, while her lord and master sat on the pony's back and blew on a tin whistle. A tin whistle away out there on the prairie, in the hands of a savage on the back of a cayusel!

"That's the cry I heard last night," I said, as Mr. Brave Warrior leaned forward and gave the squaw another cut on the shoulders, and she let out another cry. She toppled and fell. He jumped down, and began to whip her.

I could stand no more. "The dashed brütel!" I yelled, heeling my horse in the ribs, and setting off with my lariat in readiness. The beggar saw me, but didn't desist. When

within reach, I jerked my lariat savagely, catching the devil with a snap, just as he straightened up, right on his bare stomach. How he shrieked and jumped! Philip, armed with his little whip, leaped from his saddle and flailed that redskin like a madman. Never had I seen him so angry. Usually he was mild-mannered, with a pleasant smile and a merry eye.

Ambroise and the Crow arrived and restrained Philip who was sputtering:

"*Le sacré cochon*, I could kill him!" He signalled to the campers and his wife came over with a covered cart. They picked up the squaw. She was naked from the waist up, a mere skeleton, covered with bruises and gashes, and marked by many round spots made by his jabbing the end of the whistle into her. They were both young. But whereas she was emaciated, he was quite well-nourished. She had been living on the scraps, after he had had his fill. We read of the stoicism of the red man under punishment, but neither this young buck nor his poor squaw was stoic, though she yelled less under pain than he.

They put the woman into Philip's cart, and away we went to the camp. Her man had the cheek to go to Guardepuy's tent, and coax her to go back to him. The men were out on the hunt, but Philip's wife refused to let her go. He tried to make trouble, but the squaw raised such a hullabaloo that he was glad to sneak off and wait on himself.

I saw her again often, for I had many a meal in Guardepuy's tent. He was a *Métis* trader as well as a hunter, and usually set a good spread. She blossomed out into a comely young woman. The following spring, when I was in Winnipeg, and the traders came down with their robes, I went out to see Ambroise. The next tent was

Philip's. I could scarcely believe that the neat, clean, fine-looking young squaw sitting embroidering a pair of leggings with beads, was the sad creature who was hauling at the Indian pony the year before. She had married a rather solemn lover, and both were working for Guardepuy.

Nothing I ever did gave me greater satisfaction than snipping with my lariat the anatomy of the brutal chap who was her first husband. It delighted me to know that, thereafter, he whistled for her in vain.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### A BLACKFOOT-CREE WEDDING

**A**LL the world loves a lover, and John Kerr was no exception. This story of inter-tribal romance throws side-lights upon *Métis* customs, and the machinery of government as employed by the hunting fraternity:

Our luck so far had been fair, and although we were nearing Blackfoot territory, we anticipated no trouble on account of a recent truce between the Blackfeet and the Crees. We had quite a few Cree Indians with a sprinkling of Saulteaux from the Qu'Appelle district. The Crees and Saulteaux were akin in speech and custom; the Blackfeet differed greatly from them in language and racial characteristics; they were superior in physique and carriage to the other dwellers of the plains—tall, upstanding, fearless-looking and rather haughty in appearance and bearing.

One evening, after a fair day's run, all in the camp, excepting a few women who were scraping buffalo-hides, were loafing, smoking, chatting, or stretched on the grass discussing the day's run. The children gambolled about, shouting in glee. The council had not yet been called; and, by the same token, the crier who called the council to meeting was the same chap from whom I had won the unpaid bet for diving off the bridge, but as he was old and partially blind, I overlooked it. It was an hour given to utter enjoyment. Chiefs, old men, young bucks, squaws and infants—all contented and supremely happy.

About seven o'clock there cantered towards the camp, at an easy lope, a band of twenty or so young Blackfeet, including a few squaws. They made a fine picture as they rode in, erect and bold, their bodies moving rhythmically to the movement of their mounts. There were no finer riders on earth than the North American Indians, and among them the Blackfeet were pre-eminent.

Unerringly, they singled out the *Métis* councillors, rode straight to them, and sat their ponies in silence. Our chief councillor, old Sha-kas-ta-ow, stepped forward—a grand figure of a man he was—and held out his hand in greeting to the leader of the band. Then he motioned the rest, who had been sitting like bronze statues looking straight before them, to dismount.

The inevitable pipes were produced and smoked in silence; then old Sha-kas-ta-ow, who could speak the guttural Blackfoot language, parcelled out the strangers among the *Métis* for supper. By the time this was over, it was dusk, so the pow-wow was postponed till next day. Meanwhile he had them ~~shown~~ where they could tent—over on the side of the corral opposite the Grees and Saulteaux.

The next day was Sunday, so there was no hunt. I saw Sweet Grass, the old Cree chief, sending big chunks of fresh meat over to the Blackfoot camp, where one of the squaws received the offering.

Just then little *Père André* stepped to the door of the big tent used for worship by the *Métis*, and rang a hand-bell, calling his flock to service. Soon the *Métis* and a few Cree women filed into the tent. Most of the camp turned out, I among the rest. The service was not unlike others I had witnessed at the small Catholic mission in Winnipeg on Sunday afternoons, two or three years before. There was



more singing and less of ritual than in the regular mass. One of the better singers led the rest. On this Sunday the leader was Edouard Dumont, a brother of Gabriel's. As I knew one or two of the airs, I joined in. The *Métis* sang surprisingly well.

In the afternoon a pow-wow took place between the Blackfoot headmen, and the *Métis* councillors. It was a colourful gathering. The councillors sat cross-legged in a semi-circle, the old president, Sha-kas-ta-ow, in the centre; on one side his brother, Ai-Caw-Pow (the father of Dumont), on the other his nephew, Gabriel. Others of the councillors were *Petit Jean*, Baptiste Boyer, Philip Guardepuy, Pierre Parenteau, and one or two others whose names for the moment escape my memory—a fine intelligent body of men.

Opposite to them, similarly seated, were half-a-dozen of the Blackfeet, their faces showing just as keen an intelligence as the *Métis*, though masked by a certain impassiveness. A pipe with a large bowl, and a long, beautifully carved stem, made the rounds, each smoker taking a whiff or two, ending with the ejaculation *G-hahl*.

Finally a tall, imposing Blackfoot arose and explained that they had heard of this camp, and had wished to trade with it. They needed carts in exchange for horses. They understood the camp rules, the laws of the plains, and were willing to abide by them, but they did not wish to make a prolonged stay; and when they left, they would do no hunting till they joined their own band.

The *Métis* council discussed the matter, and the upshot was that the Blackfeet were allowed to camp with us. The next day we travelled, following the buffalo. It was a short move of eight or ten miles.

Now in the Cree camp were a number of maidens of marriageable age (anywhere from fourteen to twenty) who

were quite good to look at, and after the coming of the tall, handsome Blackfoot young men, these Cree damsels were at great pains to make themselves as prepossessing as possible according to their ideas on the subject. Many were the unnecessary trips to the slough for water. Down they would sit, off would come the moccasins and beaded leggings, then out into the slough they would wade, their calico skirts drawn coquettishly out of harm's way, while they leisurely filled their buckets or copper pots. Talk about coy Indian maidens! They needed no lessons in sex allure—not they!

Well, one of the young Blackfoot bloods, a fine specimen, made it a point to watch for one of the prettiest of these Cree maids. When she went for water, he would make his way to the edge of the slough, and engage her in pantomime talk, for neither could speak the other's language. Apparently they managed to understand one another.

On our first hunt after this addition to our camp, the young Blackfoot was skinning a buffalo, after the run, when two Crees rode up, one of them claiming the animal. A dispute arose. Indians just back from the chase gathered around and high words followed, the Crees siding with their tribesman, the Blackfeet with theirs. The row was at its height, and a fight imminent, when the old Cree chief rode up and turned to the Cree claiming the kill.

"You will find your beast over by that small slough," he said. "I saw you shoot it, saw it fall, then get up and hobble towards the slough, and again fall. You can follow its tracks over there."

He then led the way and, sure enough, they found the buffalo, not yet quite dead. They despatched it, and the matter ended. Had it not been for the fortunate chance that the Cree chief witnessed the shooting and the subse-

quent movements of the beast, bloodshed would certainly have followed. When the hunters downed a buffalo, they seldom stopped, but kept right on after the others and sometimes their kills were two or three miles apart; for at that time Winchesters or Henry magazine rifles were rare (I used a Springfield myself), and the Indians and some of the plains hunters, after firing a shot, loaded up again while their horses were on the run; hence the distance between kills.

About ten days later I missed the young brave, who was absent for a week. But one afternoon, when we were laid up for the day, he rode into the camp, leading two ponies—good horses too, one especially so, the other with a small tent strapped on its back, the lodge poles dragging at each side.

He rode straight to the lodge where the Cree maid lived, dismounted, and called out "*How! How!*" Whereupon the father of the girl came out, they shook hands, and the young chap handed the rope holding the lead horse, and a couple of gaudy navajo blankets, to the older man. The girl's father knew what was meant, for he took the animal, passing the rope to a boy who led it out to a band of ponies grazing on the outskirts of the camp.

Then he pulled aside the flap of his tepee, and he and the brave entered. What ceremony, if any, took place in the lodge, I don't know, but I do know that very quickly the couple emerged, the young buck vaulted on to his runner, the girl took the rope of the lead horse, and they made their way over to where the Blackfoot tents were, and put up the tepee. Quite simple, wasn't it?

Next day we had a fine run, plains hunters, Crees and Blackfeet, all together. Edouard Dumont was captain. Buffalo were plentiful, and my partner, Fisher, and I,

particularly noticed the Blackfoot brave singling out a perfect animal for his prey.

That night was a gala occasion in the lodge of the father of the bride. The crowd provoked my curiosity, and I went over and entered, bold as brass.

"*Ai-a-pee, Ai-a-pee,*" called the old man, and down I sat with a score or more. Whew! The air was tobacco-laden and hot. Suspended by a short chain from a hook was the yearling buffalo the bridegroom had been at such pains to obtain. Occasionally someone would twist the carcase, and it would swing back, the grease dropping on the fire, and making it blaze up, red-hot.

The sweat poured from every face, but I wanted to see the thing out. When the lower part of the yearling began to brown, a five-gallon copper kettle of tea was brought in. Those nearest the roast produced knives and cut off hunks which they passed back to those sitting in the rear; then the carcase was lowered nearer the fire. The tea, black as a raven's wing, and bitter-strong, was handed round in little pannikins. As some visitors left, others came in, till there wasn't enough left of that tender young buffalo to feed a cat.

The bride and groom made a handsome couple as they looked after the needs of their guests. I rolled out after I had polished off a fair-sized rib, and though I hung around to see the finish, nothing strange turned up. Smoking and speechifying wound up the affair at a little after midnight, and then the married pair walked quietly over to their own little tent.

When the Blackfoot warriors left, a week later, having traded horses for three or four carts, the newly-weds accompanied them. I did not see them again till 1875.

## CHAPTER XIX

### CHIEF BIG BEAR AND THE BISON

**B**IG BEAR, *Ursus Major*, has been likened rather to a fox, and a definitely minor fox, at that. There was nothing big about him, in stature or in soul, and few characters in the Canadian scene have adorned it less. Even those would-be radicals who erect Riel to the level of martyrdom, have no good word for the Indian Chief, Big Bear. The well-known picture of him, unkempt as to raiment, matted as to coiffure, shifty as to countenance, suggests little but dirt and deviltry.

The peak of the hunting season of 1873 had been reached, and the great band of *Métis* plainsmen had been augmented by fresh additions of Indian tribes from far and near. Several Indian chiefs led their warriors in the chase, others who were past their prime merely directed the affairs of their own men, within the main body of hunters which was presided over by the Dumont hierarchy as it might have been called. Among these chiefs, or headmen, in this summer of 1873, was Big Bear, and John Kerr's recollections have brought to light several signal instances of the non-co-operation and wily side-stepping of this redskin potentate.

Big Bear fell foul of The Law of the Plains, and consequently "got into hot water" with the authorities, if it be

not too fantastic to connect immersion in water of any temperature with this particular headman!

According to the Law of the Plains no one belonging to the camp, after having joined it, was allowed to hunt on his own account, but everyone was under the orders of the captain for the day; nor was any band, having once joined, allowed to leave till the hunt for the season was over. The reasons are surely obvious.

We now had a very large camp, *Métis* from St. Laurent, Fort Qu'Appelle, and even Wood Mountain, with a goodly number of Cree Indians from the Carlton and Pitt sections. The St. Laurent group was the largest, equalling all the other *Métis* combined; the natives had about forty lodges in all.

After a week of excellent hunting we had been laid up for five days to give the womenfolk time to prepare and tan the skins, and make pemmican and dried meat, while the men repaired carts, harness and saddles.

A hunter was then sent out on a scouting expedition. On his return he reported that most of the herd had disappeared. There were scores of small bands of buffalo in sight of the camp, but, after following their trail for some miles, he was convinced that the main body of the huge herd had been deliberately hazed away.

At the council meeting that night the matter was discussed, and Pierre Poitras was sent to ask the headmen of our Indian members to come over and talk. Three headmen came.

"Where's that other chief, Big Bear?" asked old Shakas-ta-ow. The headmen didn't know.

"Go back," ordered the old man, "and bring him."

So back went the messenger, and after a time returned with the lying, tricky rascal, who walked in with his

humped-up shoulders set in defiance, his blanket covering his head and most of his face—a sly mouthy scoundrel he was.

The scout repeated the tale of his discovery, and the headmen were asked if they knew anything about it. One and all denied any knowledge.

"Are all your young men in camp?" queried *Petit Jean*.

"Ah-huh, *tap-way*," answered the three Indians.

"How about *your* men?" enquired Gabriel of Big Bear, who shrugged his shoulders and admitted, "I can't be sure. My young men come and go as they please."

"You are the chief, are you not?"

"Yes, but I have not much control over them."

"You're not much of a chief, then," declared Gabriel.

"I am chief—" began Big Bear, getting to his feet . . .

"Oh yes," answered Dumont. "I know what sort of chief you are. You're a dirty thieving chief, that's what you are; and if any of your young men have had a hand in this it won't be well for you."

The tall upstanding frame of old Sha-kas-ta-ow, crowned with abundant locks of silver-white, towered above the craven figure of the Cree. No less commanding was the aspect of Ai-caw-pow. (The Dumont brothers were strikingly similar, and would easily have been picked out in any assembly of the *Métis* for leadership.) Gabriel's flinty features had never looked more rigid. *Petit Jean*—the same age as his cousin—made up in *hauteur* what he lacked in height.

Big Bear's glance quailed before the quartette. He turned and slunk away, followed by the other headmen.

After a lengthy conference the council acted upon Gabriel's advice to send experienced hunters in search of

the vanished herd. Gabriel himself and *Petit Jean* were appointed to follow the trail, and if possible to bring back the herd to the vicinity of the camp. Hearing this, I summoned courage to ask if I might accompany them. *Petit Jean*, a most successful hunter, hesitated; but Gabriel said: "Oh, let *mon frère* come."

"But you have no horse," objected *Petit Jean*.

"Oh yes, I have," I pleaded.

"*What!*" he exclaimed. "Do you mean your cart-horse?"

I nodded. They grinned at one another, and Gabriel said, "I'll lend him a horse," and so the matter was settled. We left shortly after noon of the next day, rode for hours, and our horses had become almost jaded before we topped a rise and came suddenly upon the object of our quest.

To our right was the north branch of the Saskatchewan. We had been skirting its well-wooded banks for over an hour, and now we descried thousands of buffalo quietly slaking their thirst in its muddy waters; thousands dotted the plains as far as eye could see, cropping the tall, lush grass; while thousands more, having eaten and drunk to repletion, were lying about in groups of from a dozen to a hundred.

The river zig-zagged in and out, its course plainly marked by the timber along its banks. From a small, shallow slough, distant about a quarter of a mile, myriads of wildfowl rose every now and again, circling around and again alighting in the muddy pool, in which a number of buffalo were awkwardly wading and tossing their big shaggy heads.

A truly pastoral scene, but instead of domestic cattle there were the wild animals in their thousands. Nor was there any habitation—no corral, no building of any sort, nothing but the broad prairie.



Three years later I passed along this same section of country and only the merest shadow of these immense herds remained, far out on the plains. At that time I was with Governor Alexander Morris, when he was making Indian Treaties at Forts Carlton and Pitt—that same treaty that old Big Bear refused to sign.

"There they are, *mon cousin!*" *Petit Jean* exclaimed. I nodded as my eye took it all in: tree-tops shimmering in the sun's last red rays, buffaloes grunting in peaceful contentment, flicking at the flies with their short tails, or scratching themselves against the trees. A sight to gladden the eyes of any man.

For a time we stood there silently. More and more buffalo kept dropping to their knees and, with a deep exhalation, rolling over on their sides, their huge heads and shoulders making hillocks, their beards sweeping the grass. Nothing apparently to startle them or arouse their suspicions, and yet they had been kept on the move continuously for four days—persistently urged forward, as we later ascertained, by a half-dozen members of the band of that wily savage, Big Bear, whose name will go down in history as the instigator of the horrible Frog Lake massacre, which took place some twelve years later. Why he wasn't hanged, I never could understand.

"We've found them," agreed Gabriel. "But where are those *sacrés sauvages?*"

"Over there," answered *Petit Jean*, handing over the field-glasses, and pointing across the river; and, sure enough, through the glasses we saw smoke about a mile back from the other bank of the stream. From the volume of it we judged that there was a fair-sized Indian camp.

"Well, what do you think, *mon cousin?*" asked *Petit Jean*.

"The best thing we can do is to get down into the woods and camp," replied Gabriel. "Then we can get up early and start them back."

"Look over there again," persisted Jean. "I'm d-----d if they haven't pushed some of them across!" We now made out some moving objects across the river, farther up than the Indian encampment. "*Les animaux!*" spluttered *Petit Jean*.

"*Bien*," remarked Gabriel. "There aren't so many. Let's leave them. If we tried to get them too, we'd not only make trouble for ourselves, but lose many from this side, for the Indians would cross in numbers, and drive them over. No, we'll do as I said, make camp and get an early start. Once we have them on the move, *les sauvages* can never stop them."

*Petit Jean* agreed. So we took our horses to the river for a drink, then to the top of the bank, where, after hobbling them tightly, we left them to graze. We built a fire, ate a little pemmican, and sat smoking. It wasn't what you would call a bright moonlight night, but it was fairly light, and as we intended to make an early start, we lay down for a wink of sleep.

"How about the horses, *mon frère?*" I asked.

"Oh, they'll be all right," answered Gabriel.

"Well," I demurred, "I'll just go up and take a look."

He laughed and made a jesting remark to his cousin, who grinned and nodded to me, calling, "*Allez-vous-en, Petit Canada! Dépêchez-vous!*"

"Oh, you're not so big yourself, *Petit Jean*," I returned, and off I went. *Petit Jean* had kept a soft spot in his heart for me, ever since I had made some salve that healed a most obstinate burn on the arm of his little daughter.

It wasn't far to the top of the bank. I had no gun but a revolver was strapped around my waist. The horses were standing quietly, and I was just turning back, when I looked again, and you could have knocked me down with a feather, for, instead of three horses, there were four!

Peering, I made out a form kneeling at one of our horses' feet. I dashed forward just as a young Indian buck got up from his knees. He made after his pony, but I grabbed and downed him. He squirmed, feeling for his knife, but I stuck my knee into his "bread-basket", making him grunt. He was as slippery as an eel.

I had called out on capturing him. The Dumonts came running, and then I let the chap up, but not a word would he say. Gabriel was for putting him through the third degree, but *Petit Jean* said we could make him talk later. So we took him and the four horses down to the fire, and sat there to await the dawn.

Just before daybreak we saddled up, after watering the horses. *Petit Jean*, at the last, had been for letting our prisoner go, but Gabriel was adamant.

So we rode along the bank towards the bison. As we neared them we yelled, and fired into the air. Up and away they went. We kept riding between the bands and the river, firing our guns and stampeding the herds till we reached the farthest band. Away they went, converging band by band, till all were making for the open prairie in one huge mass.

We then separated, keeping about a quarter of a mile apart, and not too close to the herd, Gabriel with the young Indian in the centre; *Petit Jean* nearest the river bank, from which we were gradually swerving out; and I on the outer edge. We didn't urge our horses, just let them jog along easily. About noon we rested near a small slough, not

resuming the round-up till four o'clock; and after another hour of driving the herd, we got together and made for our big camp, leaving the buffalo to wander at will.

Our arrival at headquarters with our prisoner created a stir, and a crowd gathered around the council meeting that night. Gabriel related the story of our quest, with emphasis on the numbers of buffalo which had been hazed across the stream—wide at that point and shallow, except for a little space in the centre.

I did not go to the meeting myself. I was tired, you may depend, and lay down under a cart to sleep. But Ambroise told me that when Gabriel reported the capture of the Cree, in the very act of stealing one of our horses, there were *huh-huhs* of appreciation of the part played by *le Petit Canada*.

The meeting was adjourned till next morning when it was brought out that our prisoner was one of Big Bear's men, and that he and five others were detailed by the chief to get some of the main herd moving towards the river, on the other side of which their band lived in the vicinity of Fort Pitt. The idea was to get some of the bison across the river as there were none on that side.

It was an ambitious scheme, and might have worked, but for the fact that the bucks told off to do the deed, separated more than they bargained for. Instead of a few hundred, thousands of *les animaux* joined up, and so they were between the devil and the deep sea. They had either to quit and let the big herd go back; or go on and trust to the hunters' not noticing the disappearance of so many. Luck was with them for three days, but on the fourth we were on their tracks.

Now, the problem was, what to do with Big Bear? Several penalties were voted down, chiefly because, in the long run, the camp itself might suffer, or the herds be

dispersed. The chief claimed that he should not be held accountable for what his young men had done. When reminded that he himself had named the bucks to do the job, he pleaded that he had told them to separate only a few, so that he wouldn't be under the handicap of having to cross and re-cross the river when hunting.

Then the old president reminded him that the main habitat of the buffalo was in the great delta between the North and South Saskatchewan, and advised him to move his band to the south-west side of the river. Big Bear's back-talk became too saucy for Gabriel, who jumped up, grabbed a gun from an onlooker, and jabbed the chief in the stomach with the butt-end, telling him if he didn't know how to talk decently, he'd soon show him.

I thought this was a trifle strong, considering what Gabriel himself had called the chief a couple of days before. However, Big Bear swallowed it, and went his way to his tepee. In the end he was fined only a horse, harness, and cart, which were given to one of the Wood Mountain hunters; and the six young bucks were sent to bring back the buffalo that they had hazed over the river.

They went, but brought only about half of *les animaux* across. It was no easy task. Our prisoner was then allowed to go, on petition of Gabriel, who put credence in his promise of good behaviour. It would have created bad blood between Indians and *Métis* if he had been turned over to the Hudson's Bay Company, the only authority at the time. As for taking him to Fort Garry, that was out of the question, for Gabriel, *Petit Jean* and I would have had to go as witnesses.

Gabriel was usually a stickler for the enforcement of Plains Law, and some years later handled one of his own band so roughly for an infringement thereof, that a warrant

was issued for his arrest. However, nothing came of it. He explained the case in an interview with Major-General Selby-Smith, and the matter was smoothed over. This lack of *esprit de corps* on the part of Big Bear now deepened an already existing rift between Gabriel and the Cree chief. The breach widened and was never healed.

## CHAPTER XX

### FIVE CREES—MISSING!

THE old French saw, "*Cherchez la femme!*" was seldom applicable to redskin feuds and entanglements. "*Cherchez le cheval!*" would have been more to the point. Women were easily come by, and of doubtful value, while horses were quite another story. A horse, won in a gamble, lost on a bet, stolen, trapped, tricked in a race, or of disputed ownership, might produce any note in the scale of human passion, from faint discord to clashing murder.

John Kerr's next experience of plains life brought this truth home to him, in more ways than one. He himself touched the fringe of danger in one horse-deal; while the Blackfoot chief, Red Crow, a figure in our Canadian annals, through the outcome of a more ambitious deal, fanned the flame of tribal enmity to the point of bloodshed. Here is John's story:

The hole I burnt in my blanket, on the way to Prince Albert that frigid night at the close of '72 was a cause of near-trouble with the same Blackfoot Indians who were responsible for the disappearance of the five missing Crees. The whole chain of events is clear in my memory.

After a week of good hunting we were loitering along a prairie slope, in search of water. About four o'clock in

the afternoon a band of Crees came over the hill and inspected our caravan. We numbered a hundred or so *Métis*, with fifteen or twenty Cree Indians. The newcomers, satisfied as to our identity, proceeded to make camp. We did likewise. As usual I was the only white man in the company, nor had I seen another for several months.

The incoming Crees told us of a small band of Blackfeet, two hundred or more, who were hunting thirty miles to the south. It all depended on the location as to the tribe of Indians that straggled along with the plains hunters. Sometimes these were Piegans or Blood Indians from the Edmonton district, or Blackfeet from down Montana way. East of Fort Ellice they were Crees mostly; around Fort Ellice, some Sioux; from Ellice to Fort Carlton, mainly Crees. South from where Calgary now is, we picked up Blackfeet, but generally our companions were Crees. Blackfoot warriors had no love for the Crees, and they usually kept apart, the former to the south and the latter to the north.

Among our *Métis* hunters were the three Dumont brothers, Gabriel, Edouard, and Eli (who was later killed at Duck Lake). At the council that evening, some of the half-breeds decided to drive to the Blackfoot camp to trade. The Blackfoot tribe invariably kept more horses for hunting and trading than did their Cree rivals.

I was very fortunate in my partner, Ambroise Fisher, for he had had a fair schooling in St. Boniface and could speak English fluently. Well, at daybreak next morning, he and I set out with carts and saddle-horses for the alien camp, jogging along in a party numbering forty *Métis*, about forty Crees, and myself. We sighted the Blackfoot camp just as they were taking down their poles, and halted within half a mile.



When they saw us, their headman with about forty others rode out to meet us. We formed in line a hundred yards from them, and then Gabriel and Edouard and three or four other *Métis* rode out to meet a similar number of the Blackfoot tribe. They squatted down, facing each other, passed the peace-pipe, and our party stated our object. The Blackfeet were agreeable.

Meanwhile the rest of us cantered about, shouting and firing off our guns. Why? I don't know. It was "being done", and I did it too! The pow-wow concluded, we rode into the camp, and Ambroise and I were invited into a tent by a fine-looking specimen of the tribe—tall, well-built, and every inch a man. We had something to eat, presented some trinkets to the squaw and papoose, then went to trade for a couple of horses. And *here* is where I nearly got into trouble.

Among the articles I had for barter, neatly folded on top of some other truck, was the rug with the two-inch hole burnt through it. Up came a squaw leading by a short rope a nice chestnut filly, sixteen or eighteen months old.

She indicated that she would trade the pony for the shawl. We made the exchange, and by Plains Law the deal was closed. Off she went, and I took over the pony. By and by, back came the squaw and flung down the rug at my feet. She had found the burnt place, and attempted to take the rope from my hand. I shook my head. She spoke to some Blackfeet standing by, who menaced me. But again I shook my head, for I had taken a liking to the chestnut. Though small she was a beauty and, as I afterwards found, could run like a deer. Arguments and gesticulations grew heated. One buck stepped up and confronted me, but I drew away. The squaw had had her chance to investigate, the deal was now closed. . . . More braves crowded around,

the young buck grabbed roughly at the rope, which suddenly I yanked from him, scorching his fingers in the act.

I wasted no time but vaulted on the pony's back, caught her in the ribs with my heels; and was off to the band of horses feeding a mile away. Nearly all our party had finished trading, and were heading for our camp. I jumped off the chestnut, gave her to one of our band to take along, and asked for a gun. I had left mine with Ambroise at the Blackfoot camp, where I had also left my saddle-horse and some truck.

Just then Gabriel rode up and asked what was the matter? I explained, and he handed me his rifle, and back to the camp I went on foot. There I found the Blackfoot who had entertained us, cinching my saddle on my horse. He was on the far side, and was surprised into a sudden grin when I jumped into the saddle. We parted amicably, and I yelled to Ambroise, who was in the tepee, to make haste.

Ambroise flung our stuff into the cart; and I asked him what the squaw and the young buck had done when I galloped away.

"There they come," cried he, "let's get off!"

Sure enough, there they were, with a party of savages who meant business! I pulled my firebag from my belt, threw some plugs of tobacco to the Blackfoot nearest my horse, raised my rifle over my head and cantered off with a whoop. Had I been on foot—luckily I wasn't. And that's the nearest I came to a falling-out with the redskins at that particular time.

Ambroise jogged along in the cart with the rest of our party. Edouard Dumont had traded with Red Crow, the noted Blackfoot chief, for a handsome grey stallion, a first-

class buffalo-runner. He was to pay with two cart-horses and some other truck. He had given one horse and the loose truck, and Red Crow was accompanying Edouard back to our camp to get the other horse.

I had just returned Gabriel his rifle, when up rode a half-breed to say that there was trouble ahead. Gabriel and I rode on. We found that the chief, like the squaw, had rued the bargain, and wanted his grey stallion back. He got very nasty, but came along to our camp where we arrived before sundown. We unhitched, turned the horses loose for an hour, then made the nightly corral, placing the carts in a circle, shafts outwards, forming an enclosure into which the animals were easily driven.

With the new Crees we made a big camp. It was in an ideal spot, near a slough eight feet deep in the centre. Wild ducks, wavies, sand-hill cranes and larger waterfowl, haunted its edges. Buffalo-runs in plenty led to the water, and at the evening council it was decided to camp there for some days, make pemmican, and dry meat; for there were buffalo-chips in abundance for fuel. Then we would resume the hunt.

Ambroise and I had recently employed an Indian boy, called Little Dog, to help us run the buffalo. Sometimes he used the bow and arrow, sometimes one of our guns. He hadn't a horse, but used one of ours in the hunt. He was what is known as a Bungay Indian, a Cree or Chippewa of mixed blood, from down Lake Winnipeg way—an upstanding buck, and a good hunter. Towards dusk, this Little Dog came up and asked for a gun, a blanket, and a saddle. I gave them to him, and he departed.

Said Ambroise, "What did he want them for? We aren't hunting to-morrow."

I didn't know, but sleepily crawled under my cart for the night. Ambroise and his wife slept under a cart with a tent thrown over it, and between their cart and mine was another. The horses were all in the corral, most of them loose, but the valuable grey stallion that Edouard had got from Red Crow, was hobbled with chain and padlock and iron shackles. There were two hundred and fifty head in the enclosure. Guards were set, and fires built at intervals.

At midnight I was awakened by shots and shouts. The cart between mine and Ambroise's had been pulled out. I called to him, we shoved the cart back, and ran around to one of the fires. Great was the excitement. Someone had taken a horse out of the corral, let out a whoop, and ridden off hell for leather. The guards fired twice, in vain, and none ventured to follow.

Next morning, the grey stallion was missing, the shackles lying on the ground inside the corral—and Little Dog was gone also. He had performed a remarkable feat, undetected, and surely there was the mischief to pay! A party set out to trail him, but returned empty-handed. Plainly, Little Dog had thought he was stealing the Blackfoot chief's horse, never dreaming that Edouard Dumont had traded for it. Edouard now refused to give Red Crow the other animal he had agreed to trade. The chief sullenly departed.

Alas, when we had left the Blackfoot camp on the previous day, five young Crees from our own party had foolishly stayed behind. They were never seen again. After some days their anxious relatives set off to find them. But the Blackfoot camp had vanished. So had the Blackfeet. And the Crees had met their end, for revenge must have run high on the frustrated chief's return.

A council-of-war was held. The younger Cree bucks were for following the Blackfoot braves, but the half-breeds declined. A relative of one of the departed Crees rode round and round our camp wailing till I felt like taking a shot at him; he curdled my blood. Ambroise explained that the mourner was trying to work on the Crees to go on the war-path. However nothing was done. Those five crazy young bucks had paid the last price of tribal enmity.

## CHAPTER XXI

### RETURN FROM THE PLAINS

**S**HORTLY before Little Dog made his sensational get-away, there were indications that the long hunting season was near its end. The half-breed plainsmen usually made three hunts: the spring hunt (extending through the summer as circumstances favoured it), the short early autumn hunt, and another quite late in the fall for winter supplies of meat and robes, the spring and summer buffalo skins being comparatively worthless. Signs of approaching autumn were to be seen on every hand, and John Kerr had agreed with Baptiste Boyer to set off for Winnipeg somewhat in advance of the departure of the main body of hunters for the settlement on the South Saskatchewan.

But before they left, before indeed the flight of Little Dog from the camp, an event took place which brought anew to John's attention the versatility of his hero, Gabriel Dumont.

Little Dog had brought down a buffalo with the bow and arrow, and Ambroise and I, among many others so occupied on the vast plain, had gone out to skin and cut up the carcase. While we worked, we saw Little Dog chasing a bison towards us.

"Jump on the horse," cried Ambroise, "and head off the buffalo so it will be killed here."

I rode out on the cart-horse, rather to one side, as the bull was charging straight for me.

"Head him off!" yelled Ambroise. "You're afraid of him."

I *was* afraid. I hadn't a gun, and was on a cart-horse with blinkers on him, a beast that couldn't run fast enough to keep himself warm; and, make no mistake, a buffalo, either cow or bull, can *run*. So I took no chances and circled out beyond the bull, and tried to edge him towards Ambroise, but without much success.

However, on we went, I a little in advance of the bull, Little Dog not far behind. All at once the animal stood still, Little Dog had wounded it. I halted about seventy-five feet ahead of the beast, the Indian about the same distance behind it. I flung my leg over the horse's back, and was sitting sideways watching the buffalo—my horse stood at an angle to the bull, and, wearing blinkers, could not see him. Suddenly Mr. Buffalo's tail straightened out, and he made a bee-line for me. My steed, blissfully unconscious, resisted all my efforts to get out of the way, and the charging bull came straight for the horse, and drove his right horn into the animal's belly, knocking him over.

The bison did not gore the horse again, but tore on. Little Dog, pursuing it, cried to me as he swept past, "*Néminantou*, that's nothing!"

Only a little spot of blood was visible alongside the animal's hind leg, so I remounted and rode a few yards, when the beast halted. To my horror I saw that his entrails protruded from the wound.

Off I jumped, calling to Ambroise to come over. He helped me to throw the horse and left me to watch him while he got a needle and some sinew from the camp. After what seemed an endless time he returned, and to-

gether we performed an operation, I handling the knife and enlarging the wound sufficiently to restore the protruding organs.

For days we looked to see that creature "kick the bucket". He got as thin as a washboard, and whenever we moved camp I stayed by him, leading him along. We gave him every care, but I thought him doomed, and finally reported his condition to Gabriel Dumont who, at the moment, was smoking with others of the *Métis*.

"*Bien, mon frère,*" puffed he, "we shall soon see."

He examined the horse and, finding a sac where the wound had been, deftly evacuated the pus, and dressed the scar. From that moment the horse began to mend. The following spring, when some of the hunters came to Fort Garry, where I had wintered, to sell their furs, Ambroise Fisher came to see me, and the first question I asked was "How's the horse?"

"He's all right. Come on out to camp and see him."

I did; and there he was, fat as a seal. Crude as that piece of surgery was, there was another, still more crude and equally successful, during my time on the plains.

The Indians had a poor make of gun. They used them for both shot and bullet. While fowling they used shot, and when running buffalo they used ball. On horseback, while reloading, they never stopped; they held the gun by the barrel, poured in the powder, then the ball (no wadding), and as they carried the bullets in their mouths, they were wet. After a round was fired, the gun-barrel was more or less sticky, so that the powder stuck to the barrel, and the wet ball sometimes did not go down all the way, and then the gun was apt to explode.

This very thing happened to one of the Crees in our camp, and his fingers were badly smashed. They sent for



Gabriel—in any trouble he was invariably sent for—and he told the Indian that his fingers would have to come off.

"All right," agreed Lo, "take them off." Dumont did not delay. Taking a heavy knife (called a Green River hunting-knife) with a blade especially thick at the back to facilitate the breaking of the bones of killed game, Gabriel held the Cree's wrist firmly with his left hand, spread the mangled fingers across a gunstock resting evenly upon the ground, made a couple of swift strokes—and the job was done.

It gave me the creeps. But the Cree never whimpered, just grinned. Gabriel then bound up the hand, tying a piece of sinew around the wrist. Rude and crude in the extreme, this operation of nearly seventy years ago. Next day I saw the poor beggar with his bandaged hand, as he lay on a *travois* drawn by a dog. I said "How!" to him, and he replied, "How! How!" I never saw him again, but heard that his hand healed up in fine style.

Baptiste Boyer and John Kerr made good time on their return from the plains. The soft haze of the late August mornings, the sharp breeze that sprang up in mid-afternoon, hints of frost in the depth of night,—all served to impress John with the fact that considerably more than a year had elapsed since he had left the raw civilization of Fort Garry for the free life of the open prairie. He felt rather like a Canadian Rip Van Winkle.

In due course, the travellers reached what was known as "the Crossing"; on the south branch of the Saskatchewan. There was only one ferry then in use. Later, so John heard, there was the Batoche Crossing, also Gabriel's Crossing, but in 1872-73 there was only THE Crossing, two or three miles below St. Laurent. The scow was simply poled

across, no rope to guide it as at Winnipeg, and parties using it left the old bateau on the side they landed on. When John's caravan had sighted the Crossing in the previous year, the scow was on the wrong side, and he had solved the problem for his impatient party by swimming the river, dragging the scow upstream, and poling it over to them.

From the *Métis* at the Crossing, John and Boyer now learned the strange tale of a young Indian with a fine grey horse, who had lately joined the local company of Crees and half-breed traders. Gossip had cast suspicion upon the lad's assertion that he had got the animal from a Blackfoot chief. In fact, when questioned as to the price he had paid, he boldly replied that he had stolen it. Stealing by one tribe of Indians from another tribe, was looked upon, not as a crime, but as an act to glory in—spoiling the Egyptians, as it were. But in this case—a Blackfoot chief! The Crees were impressed, but the traders did not believe him. They suspected the horse had been taken from one of the plainsmen about to return from the hunt.

"By George!" cried John, linking new facts to old; "that's Little Dog, and he has my gun. I must hunt him up."

Off he went. It was raining, but among a clump of poplars he found a tepee.

"Hello!" he cried, and a squaw emerged. "Is Little Dog in the tent?" he asked.

"No", she declared, but he knew she was lying, and made to get off his horse, when the tent-flap was pulled aside, and out stepped his erstwhile employee looking rather sheepish.

"Where are my gun, saddle and blanket?" shouted John.

"Inside," Little Dog admitted. "I'll get them."

He brought them out, and offered to hand them over.

"What did you take the gun for?" demanded John.

"To defend myself."

"And the blanket?"

"To sleep in."

He offered to pay John in furs, but the offer was declined. "I'll take my gun and saddle, but you may keep the blanket." (In telling the story John adds, "I didn't want it for obvious reasons.")

Concerning the horse, Baptiste and John agreed that Nemesis would shortly overtake young Little Dog, and they left the Crossing without breaking silence regarding it. Their judgment was sound, as John learned the next spring from Ambrose Fisher. A week or so after he had journeyed on, the hunters returned in force to St. Laurent. They too soon heard about the Indian and the stallion. Edouard Dumont and others went to the Crossing, and demanded the animal, which Little Dog refused them, saying he had stolen it from a Blackfoot chief.

He had Cree Indians behind him, so Edouard went for help, returned, and took the beast by force. The same night Little Dog went to the settlement, recaptured the stallion, and hid it. Surely a case of *Cherchez le cheval* in good earnest!

Next day, what a rumpus! Edouard and his party assailed the horse-thief, and Little Dog finally made this odd proposal: "You say you traded two horses for this one, but you've given Red Crow only one of them, because you

didn't get the grey. Then you owe him one horse yet. Give *me* the one you're riding and I'll hand over the stallion."

Edouard presently agreed, and the exchange was made. Then up walked Little Dog, whipped out his knife, spat on it, and smacked Edouard across the cheek, daring him to fight it out. Edouard refusing, the Indian, in a towering rage, dared any one of them; but none accepted the challenge, as there were Crees about in plenty, and a gory battle—such as was always so greatly deplored by the good little *Père André*—would have ensued. ("If Gabriel had been there!" John interjects. "He never took a dare from anyone, red or white.")

So Edouard got his horse, and was glad to drop the matter. That fire-eater and daredevil hunter, Little Dog, had also got a horse—not nearly so good, but still a horse. If it comes to that, Chief Red Crow had acquired a horse—distinctly inferior, but better than nothing at all. And so Little Dog passes out of John's reminiscences, except for one encounter in the month of January, 1875, when John, then a trader, was wintering at Buffalo or Bull Lake, some ninety miles south of Edmonton. Lured by the tom-tom, John entered a gambling game, and lost heavily.

I was watching the guesser and hadn't looked at my opponent. I kept on losing till I was denuded of everything I had on except my drawers. Then I scrutinized my Indian rival, saw that he was grinning, and got blazing mad . . . but somehow he seemed familiar . . . well, *well*, if it wasn't Little Dog! Up we got, shook hands, and he gave me back my shirt and trousers. In the talk that ensued he told me that he had more than a dozen horses,

six carts, a wife and a papoose (in order of importance). Thus indeed had the redskin brand of virtue brought rich rewards in its train.

Day by day the prairies spun out behind the travellers. September set in, and John, as he jogged onward, reviewed the immediate and the more remote past. Faces rose before him, the faces of white men to whom he was returning; of others whose paths had led them elsewhere—his old buddies, Bell and Steele, his erstwhile commanding officers, Colonel Jarvis and Captain de Plainval. Captains Butler and Mansfield looked in on his reflections, Charles Mair, the mission folk at Prince Albert, and, crowding in, with an insistence that he knew to be fateful, were the features of many a *Métis* comrade, Pierre, Moïse, Ambroise, Philip, Louis, *Petit Jean*, Baptiste riding so sombrely beside him—and Gabriel. Above all, Gabriel.

A mischance detained Baptiste, and John rode on ahead. Encounters on the trail were more frequent as they neared the settlements, and soon a half-breed trader, heading west and travelling light, stopped to exchange greetings. From him John learned that Valentine Christian was not far to the east, commencing his long trek out to British Columbia.

John was deeply tanned and his straight black hair fell to his shoulders. He was dressed like a half-breed and was far from immaculate. A sudden idea took possession of him, and with him to think was to act.

I reached the top of a long slope and saw a man sitting by the trail away down at the bottom. I judged it was Christian, preceding his outfit. So I charged down the hill, yelling, and brandishing my gun. I looked like an Indian

and Val took me for one and pulled his revolver. I rode up, drew my horse to a quick halt, jumped off and went up to him. He didn't recognize me.

"How! How!" I grunted and stuck out my paw.

"How!" said Val, and gave me a fierce grip.

I made some signs as if I couldn't speak English, and he looked very hard at me. I couldn't keep my face straight. I just had to grin.

"Blast your hide, Jack!" roared Val, "I nearly put a slug in you."

Well, we sat down, but were barely seated when he asked, "How far did you go with Fullerton?" We both had taken boxing lessons in Winnipeg with Professor Fullerton. "Did he show you the cross buttock?"

I laughed, and said "No."

"Come on," he urged, "and I'll show you!"

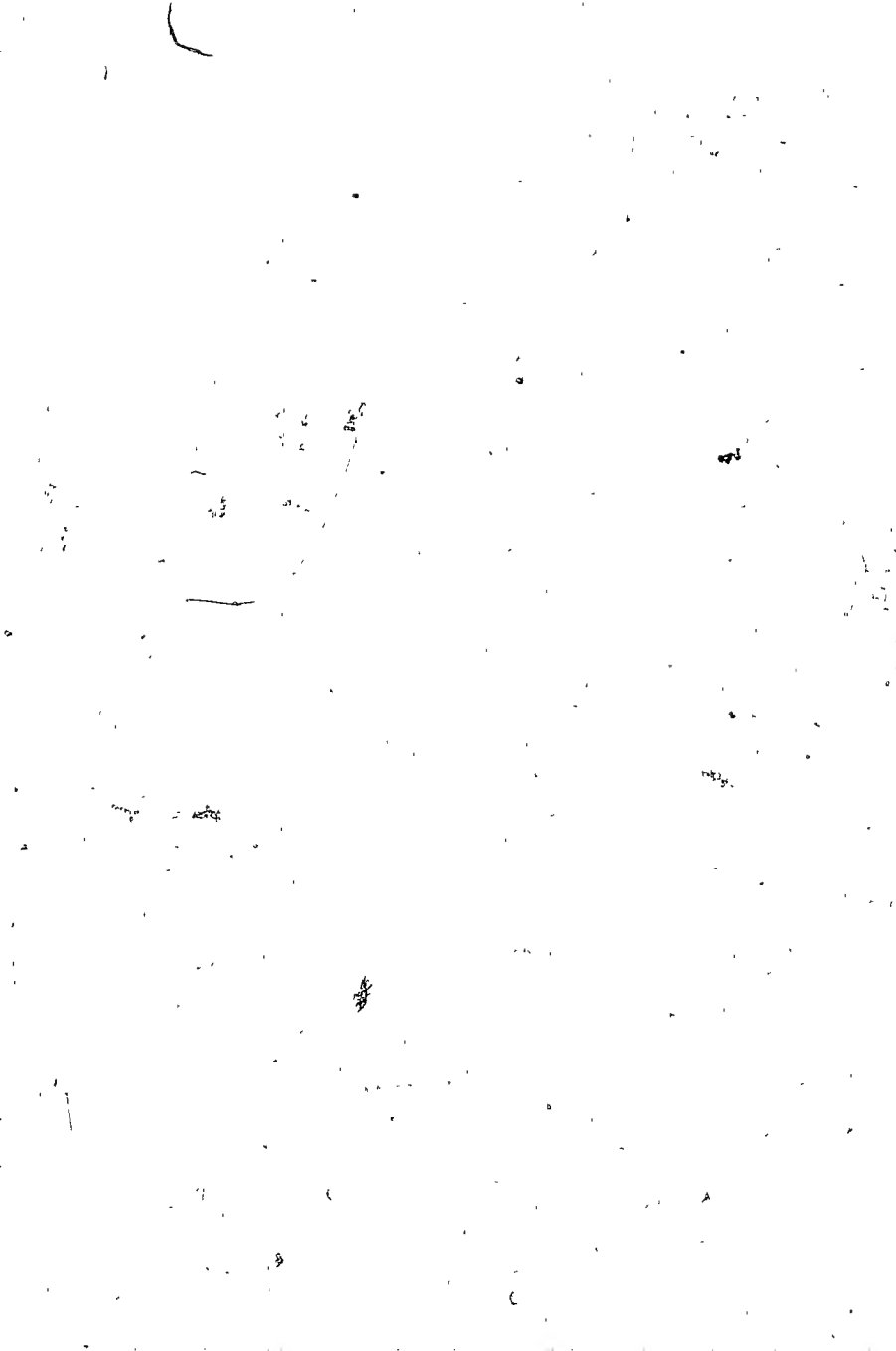
"Thanks," I demurred, "I'll take your word for it." He was crazy about boxing.

We had half-an-hour's chat and then his train of carts came up from the east and passed us, and Baptiste rode along from the west. Val and I chinned but a moment longer. Then he set his face towards the Pacific, and I rode on to Fort Garry. After that last handshake we never met again.



SECTION III  
TRADER AND INTERPRETER





## CHAPTER XXII

### THE ARREST OF LÉPINE

**P**ERHAPS there was something of the lightning-change artist inherent in John's disposition. He certainly must have made swift tonsorial and sartorial adjustments to enable him to appear, as he did on September 16th, before Magistrate O'Donnell in Winnipeg to be sworn in as a special constable engaged for the important job indicated by this chapter heading.

No student of Canadian press reports during the three-year period following the arrival of troops in Fort Garry, can fail to be struck by the constant reference to the movements of Riel and Lépine. Just as constant was the state of discontent and misgiving, rising often in a crescendo of disgust and alarm occasioned by the apparent leniency accorded them. They came and they went. Riel was bribed for several months to stay out of the country, while at the same time the authorities claimed to be making every effort to apprehend him. Sometimes Lépine was said to be in hiding; at others he was openly abroad in the land. In Parliament and the legislature, irate members recorded ireful opinions, and, as we have seen, Fort Garry opinion was that the gentleman would not be taken without bloodshed. Strange situations developed. Items such as these may be culled from almost any newspaper:

Fort Garry, Feb. 12th, 1873. Mr. Wilson, late Opposition candidate for Selkirk, was fined for refusing to sit in the same Grand Jury with Lépine, who commanded the party that shot Scott.

March 1st. Louis Riel was put on the Grand Jury in Provencher recently, and a loyal Frenchman refused to sit.

The Dominion Government was steadily berated in those days, even by many who did not see eye to eye with each other in basic political beliefs.

However, time wore on, and on Tuesday, September 16th, 1873, a joint warrant was issued for the arrest of Riel and Lépine. The charge was the murder of Thomas Scott. Riel could not be found, but Lépine was arrested. "The warrant", so runs the official account of the famous Lépine trial, "was placed in the hands of three constables, Ingraham, Kerr and Dupont, who succeeded in making the arrest." John gives further details:

I don't know that I ever saw a darker night. A team and democrat had been hired from Sinclair Bros. Livery on Fort Street, one of the brothers driving. Johnny Ingraham, who had been with me in the Manitoba Constabulary, was acting as deputy for Sheriff Edward Armstrong, and had taken Edwin Doidge and me to be sworn in for this undertaking. Léon Dupont was a French-Canadian, qualified as guide and interpreter.

It rained "cats and dogs". We crossed the Red River on the old scow, scrambled up the bank, and took the road to St. Vital. It became darker and darker, the horses couldn't keep the road, the guide lost his bearings, and didn't know

just where we were. I got down from the wagon, tied a white handkerchief to my hat, and went ahead on the road; the team following the kerchief.

We fought a losing battle with Red River mud, and were almost in despair when we caught a flickering gleam from someone's lantern. We turned into the ditch, pulled down the rail fence, and drove over a ploughed field; there we found a *Métis* farmer carrying a light between his house and barn.

We said we had lost our way, and asked if he could put us up till morning, and stable our team. He agreed, helped unhitch and took the horses to the barn while we went to the house. He asked us a lot of questions, which Ingraham answered, through Dupont, in an evasive manner. I could see that the fellow wasn't satisfied, and to this day I believe that he managed to get word to Riel, who lived not far away.

At any rate, early next morning, when we reached the Riel homestead, our bird had flown. We searched the premises thoroughly—but no Riel.

The log house was a typical settler's home. Just as we were leaving, we noticed in the ceiling near the front entrance, a small square opening covered by a trap-door. Doidge and Ingraham hoisted me up, I lifted the lid, scrambled in, and stumbled about in the dim shadows, when my foot slipped from one of the joists, and down through the ceiling I fell, right on to a four-poster bed! Coated with dust and plaster, and clothed with dismay, I made profuse apologies to the sisters of Riel, who were already sufficiently upset and annoyed by our incursions. We promised to pay for the damage, and drove along to the abode of Lépine.

To our knock Ambroise called out "*Entrez!*" Ingraham, Dupont and I walked in and found Riel's adjutant-general sitting with his child on his knee, while Madame Lépine was preparing the breakfast. Ingraham exhibited the warrant, and Léon Dupont, acting as spokesman, according to Ingraham's order, tried to camouflage the charge as for a debt owing. This was a useless subterfuge, for Lépine was not deceived. He knew, and said, that the charge was murder.

When our prisoner had eaten, he left the large front room—kitchen and living-room combined—entered a bedroom at the rear, and shortly emerged with a revolver in his hand.

"I could kill every one of you!" he announced firmly, sweeping us all with the fire of his black eyes.

I was standing near a large box-stove—not the one used for cooking—my hand resting along its top, my own little bulldog trained on him.

"You'd better not try it," I advised him. He muttered something as he cast a glance in my direction, turned, re-entered the bedroom, and soon appeared in his suit of store clothes.

Of this scene, Rev. R. G. MacBeth (*Making of the Canadian West*, 1898) after describing Lépine's prodigious strength, makes the following report:

"Speaking of his arrest, it is told that, when the two men who were entrusted with the duty of executing the warrant, went to his house in the night, Lépine took a look at them, and, remarking that he could knock their heads together if he wished, nevertheless got ready and went unresistingly along with them."

Comparing this with the actual facts as stated above, it will be seen that there were three of us—not two; that

the time was not night, but morning; and that Lépine's threat was of a different nature. He would have had quite a time knocking our heads together, for Ingraham and I were about twelve feet apart, and Dupont was on the other side of Ingraham.

It is true, however, that Ambroise accompanied us without show of violence, after taking leave of his weeping wife and child. He was even cheerful and companionable on the drive towards the ferry, and, finding that I could speak French fairly well, he addressed his conversation to me as well as to Dupont. I knew many of his friends on the plains.

Quite suddenly I remembered a night jollification, when my chum, Charles Bell, and I had pitched our tent among some bushes on the banks of the Assiniboine River. I recalled that Lépine had been the name of a visitor to a neighbouring tent—a visitor scarcely seen in the darkness. I spoke of the occasion to Lépine, and he remembered it well.

"So you were in that tent near Headingly that night!" he exclaimed, puffing contentedly at his pipe, after Ingraham had refused his request for liquor and cigars; and, until we reached the ferry at St. Boniface, he kept asking me questions.

The glimpse that John has given us of the old ferry at St. Boniface, is too vivid to be ignored. Ingenious, he called it. The passage was relatively swift, and the river was made to do the work. A cable was stretched across the stream, secured to the high banks. The scow was fastened to this by ropes and pulleys on the lower side of the cable. When the load was ready, the scow was pushed out from the landing, the outer nose was snubbed up to the cable by

means of the pulley, and the other end slackened down river. The current drove it across; and the higher the water, the swifter the current and the greater the speed. Pulleys regulated the passage.

The six occupants of the democrat found the scow over on the Winnipeg side, loading for the return trip. This delay was fraught with danger, for word got about among the half-breeds in the vicinity that Lépine was under arrest, and the excitement grew. The *Métis* had always sided with Lépine, and when the riverman in charge of the ferry heard that the rebel was in the toils of the law, he refused to allow the wagon to drive on to the scow. When assured that he would himself be under arrest if he resisted, the man reluctantly yielded. A large crowd menaced the party at the Winnipeg landing, but they drove through it to the Sheriff's place, and from there to the fort.

Lépine was lodged in the roomy south-west bastion of Fort Garry and Doidge and I were placed in charge. Doidge was a Volunteer of 1870. At the time of the second Riel uprising in 1885, he was pay sergeant to the Winnipeg Field Battery.

The south-west bastion had been a guardroom for us of the 1st Ontario Rifles, and in this already familiar spot, three cots were provided us, as well as a table and chairs, and our meals were sent in. There were no soldiers in the fort at this time. They had been moved out, but the Sheriff had arranged with the Hudson's Bay Company, for use of the bastion.

In this setting the dire events of the late months of 1869 and the first half of 1870 had been enacted. The roles were reversed; Lépine was now prisoner instead of gaoler.

And here for some weeks, I had an opportunity to study the man whose hand had lain so heavily upon the settlers of the Red River district, over three years earlier.

As has been said, Lépine was a man of huge stature, six feet three inches at least, and splendidly proportioned. Also he was blessed with a dark, masculine beauty which would have won comment anywhere. His features were large, well-cut and impressive, his hair raven-black, his eyes extraordinarily compelling. Straight, lithe and graceful, he was also quick and sure-footed. At this time he must have been thirty-three years of age, but seemed more mature.

There is no doubt whatever concerning his personal courage. He was known as a dangerous man in conflict, a rough-rider, and a marksman; and MacBeth is not the only historian who believed that the control he exercised over his compatriots was largely due to his physical prowess and his magnificent military appearance.

An exuberance of this sort had to be worked off while Ambroise was in confinement so that, in addition to playing cards and checkers, we indulged in jumping exercises, and even tried a few bouts with the gloves. Here I found that I had the advantage, for Lépine knew nothing about boxing. I had no difficulty in tapping him, and he seldom hit me. I was then a fairly tall young stripling of twenty-two, with more than average strength, but I wouldn't have courted a blow from Lépine—a clout from his fist would have been like the kick of a mule.

And so the days passed until the law was brought to bear on our prisoner. The proceedings at first were carried on in English only, but at Lépine's request an interpreter was called for. No better being at hand, I acted in that capacity for a short time, until replaced by a French-Canadian named Garneau.



Through adjournments and eternal argument over the question of jurisdiction, this preliminary examination dragged its weary length. It was forecast that there would be much red tape before Lépine could actually be tried. On October 14th, a made-out case was found, and he was committed to stand trial in the approaching November term. On November 15th, Mr. Justice McKeagney presiding, a True Bill was found, but again the case was obstructed by the question of jurisdiction. The judge deferred decision. . . . December 22nd found the matter of bail settled for the sum of \$8,000, and, to the wrath of much of the populace, Ambroise Lépine returned to the bosom of his family.

The case was called again on February 10th, 1874. This time Lépine was jailed at the Lower Fort, where I visited him several times. When he was brought to Winnipeg for trial he asked the Sheriff if I might again guard him, but I was clerking for a jeweller there and was not able to remain steadily with Lépine.

Legal battles taking pages to record resulted in a stalemate. Again Lépine was at large until the term of June 1874. Under Chief-Justice E. B. Wood the bogey of jurisdiction was finally laid and the trial was fixed for a date in the immediate future. However, the business of the term would not permit of a hearing, and it was not until October 1874, more than a year and a month after his arrest, that Ambroise Didyme Lépine stood up to answer for his sins.

Few Canadians who have delved into Western history are unacquainted with what Britton Cooke calls "that revolting story" of March 4th, 1870. Thomas Scott was first apprehended as he went unarmed to Fort Garry to ask Riel to give safe conduct to the women and children then

at the house of Dr. Schultz. With others he was imprisoned. Like them he was half frozen and heartlessly abused. His detractors assert that he was "arrested for seditious activities and was set at liberty on condition that he respect the established government", namely, the dictatorship of Riel. Their subsequent abuse of him is built up on the false assumption that Scott had violated his parole. The incontestable fact is that he *escaped*.

Naturally he joined the settlers assembling to liberate the remaining prisoners. Although Riel released these prisoners on condition of their not taking up arms, the would-be rescuers were themselves seized, and Scott, again unarmed, was among the new victims. On March 3rd some unspeakable treatment caused him to rebel. The ensuing scuffle was made the pretext for a "court martial", under Lépine, held that same evening in the French language. Completely ignorant of the proceedings, Scott was finally informed that he was to die at ten o'clock in the morning.

He was permitted the services of the Rev. Dr. Young of Grace Church throughout the night, and was allowed to write some letters and, in the morning, to bid the other prisoners good-bye. At noon on March 4th—Riel grumbling at the two hours' delay—Scott knelt in the snow outside an entrance to the fort. He was shot by a firing squad commanded by Lépine, in so bungling a manner that despite a *coup de grâce* he still lived. He was placed in a rough wooden box, and carried inside the fort. About five in the evening, sounds issued from this coffin, "My God! Put an end to me!" Until nearly midnight these were heard at intervals, when, according to John Bruce, former President of the Provisional Government, "a person whose

name I withhold" gave poor Scott the finishing stroke, with the remark, "He is dead this time!"

At Lépine's trial were twenty-seven witnesses for the Crown, seven for the defence. They made up a cross-section of the Canadian West: French and Scottish half-breeds, guards at the fort, a Methodist minister, an Anglican Bishop, a Roman Archbishop, a priest, small farmers, gentlemen of fortune, servants of the Hudson's Bay Company, prisoners of Riel, ex-officers of his government—all testified at this memorable trial.

The jury returned a verdict of "Guilty, with a recommendation to mercy". On Wednesday, November 4th, Lépine was sentenced to hang. A more scathing speech than that addressed to the prisoner by the Bench, before pronouncing sentence, it would be difficult to find in our annals.

However, the reaction among the French half-breeds in the West, and the French-Canadians of Quebec province, was immediate. They rightly held that Lépine was not alone in culpability. Many signatures were attached to petitions praying for a commutation, and Lord Dufferin, under the stress occasioned by these documents, took the advice of the Earl of Carnarvon, Secretary of State for the Colonies, and commuted the sentence to two years' imprisonment with loss of political rights.

Of his subsequent relations with the prisoner John Kerr writes:

As Lépine had already served part of his time, it was not so very long before he was again at large. I was never in attendance on him during the actual trial, for by that date I was away in the remote West. After his release I

frequently met him on the streets of Winnipeg, or in the bowling-alleys, with the inevitable bars which flourished in those wild-west days. Riel's right-hand man was no teetotaller, and I was still resolutely sober, so that the powerful half-breed was sometimes hilarious at my expense, particularly when annoyed at my refusal to imbibe.

"Jack, you rascal!" he would exclaim, "how much did you get for arresting me? Enough to buy a drink, eh boy?" If I failed to see his point, he would become somewhat ugly. As a matter of fact, the Government divided \$1000 between the three of us who participated in the capture, and I had realized the sum of \$333.33; a circumstance which induced Lépine to parade me jocosely before his half-breed friends.

Once, as I was engaged in a game of bowls, at a place called, I think, *The Pride of the West*, Lépine and some of his cronies entered the bar. When I refused to drink Lépine clamoured for a song.

"This dog can sing," he informed the others. Reluctantly I seated myself at the dance-hall piano. Then I had an inspiration. I would get even! I sang a verse from one of our old marching-songs of 1870—which we of the Red River Expeditionary Force used to shout to the tune of *Marching Through Georgia*:

"Our flag has been insulted by the murder of poor Scott,  
Who by Riel's order was so very foully shot,  
The murderers, if captured, will be hanged upon the spot—  
As an example at Fort Garry."

I had hardly foreseen the outcome! Lépine descended upon me, hammer and tongs, and if a French-Canadian called Gingras had not intervened till others came to the rescue, this page might never have been written, for Ambroise was possessed of almost superhuman force.

It is only fair to say that, later on, I met him on Main Street, and he expressed regret for the incident.

"You shouldn't have sung that song, Jack," he said, offering his hand. But in my heart I knew that I was not sorry.

The appraisal of Lépine's character was almost the last subject that engaged John Kerr's mind. Plowing through the verbatim report of the trial, consulting old records, assembling every available estimate, and finally calling upon his keen memory, he was probably at the end of 1939 the greatest living authority on the subject. It has been shown that he was by no means prejudiced against the *Métis*—quite the contrary!—but no one could have been more genuinely amazed when shown the following quotation from the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*: "Lépine maintained a quiet and retired life, while Canada by her own act kept herself deprived of one of the most capable and unselfish leaders of men that she has ever produced."

"Bunk!" stoutly declared John Kerr.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### A TRADING TRIP TO THE FAR WEST

WINNIPEG had grown in some respects too quickly to preserve a sense of balance. There was often an air of breathlessness about the place. Judging from the tales of old-timers, it would appear that everyone was willing to try anything and everything once. John Kerr has remarked on his employment in a jewelry business early in 1874, but his first occupation after the preliminary examination of Lépine, seems to have been that of deputy to Sheriff Armstrong. He performed bailiffs duties. Later he kept books not only for George Northgraves, watchmaker and jeweller, but also for William Chambers, gunsmith and vendor of gunsmith's supplies. This twofold task was facilitated by the fact that jeweller and gunsmith did business in the same store. It must have been possible, at that date, for a young blade to have an engagement ring and a revolver wrapped up in the same parcel, and thus armed press his suit to advantage!

Liquor had a demoralizing influence in those early days, and John notes an occasion when his own abstinence singled him out with comic if somewhat annoying results. It was at about this time that he was confined overnight in the police station, and marched to the court in the morning "to answer to a charge of interfering with a policeman in

the discharge of his duty, said policeman having been drunk at the time". The magistrate was "not strictly sober", John's attorney was "in a like condition", the charge was dismissed, "and everybody adjourned to the Davis House".

John was still wrestling with the accounts of his two employers, when John McLatchie, an experienced westerner, visited the store and asked for his services as guide and trader. McLatchie desired to go west during the summer season. The proposal fell upon sympathetic ears for John Kerr had begun to dream of the wilderness again. Two chaps named Fred Sache and Tom Isbister were also hired, and the party was augmented by Donald MacLeod, a freighter and guide on his way to Edmonton. MacLeod handled train-loads of goods for the Hudson's Bay Company. In his charge for part of this trip were also two Methodist ministers, and a lady teacher for an Indian mission school.

The date of their departure from Winnipeg was set in John's recollection as late August or early September, for he recalled seeing the swarm of locusts arriving that year to the consternation of the settlers on the Red. It took on an average two months to travel from Fort Garry to Edmonton, which they reached early in November. The rate of progress depended largely on where water could be found. A day's travel might cover thirty miles or more, but often sank to twelve or eighteen. A cart-load weighed about nine hundred pounds, and for a long journey the traveller had to husband his horse's strength. Faster time was made on shorter trips.

Now twenty-three years of age, and better acquainted with the problems and possibilities of the West, John

traversed the prairie in this autumn of 1874 with an awakened sense of its future values, and a sharp appreciation of the types of humanity encountered on the way. These long western treks took on the character of a pilgrim's progress, or of a set of Canterbury tales. When, as often happened, missionaries shared the daily risks and adventures, a simple migration might easily have seemed like a crusade.

John has sketched a few of his travelling companions for his own pleasure, and two of these pen-pictures are significant. First there was Bill Ewing, from across the boundary:

The desperate cowboy type of character made popular by cheap fiction and melodrama, was non-existent at this period on the plains. Men of that stamp were later associated with mining camps. But we had one experience with a fellow who dressed like, and looked the part of, the typical western cowboy. Bill Ewing, he called himself.

During one of our October noontide meals, a man blew in on a little sorrel pony. He wore a tall, broad-brimmed felt hat, leather chaps, gun-belt with guns, cartridges and rifle, and he sat a heavy Mexican saddle. Freckled and sunburnt, he had a bristly beard of ten days' growth, blue eyes, a large mouth, and splendid teeth. All-in-all, he was a good specimen of the plainsman from over the line—but no cowboy.

"Howdy?" he called, jovially.

"Howdy!" we chorussed. "Jump down and have a bite."

"Suits me fine," he admitted. Then he added, "Call me Bill."

"All right," said MacLeod. "I'm Donald, and these are Tom, Jack, Fred and Mac."



Bill buckled to with a will. My gracious, he was ravenous! Hadn't eaten for two days, and made no bones about it.

"Your pony looks leg-weary," I observed. "Where'd you come from?"

"Naouw, no questions," he drawled. "I've ridden quite a ways, you can gamble on that. Where're you fellows heading?"

"Edmonton," Tom returned. "Where you off to?"

"I'll go a little ways with you, if you don't mind," said the newcomer.

We told him he was welcome, and he turned to and helped us hook up.

We travelled ten or twelve miles that afternoon, then camped for the night. After supper we sat around spinning yarns, smoking, and taking it easy. I had brought in a pony that had a shoulder-sore caused by his collar, and was applying a home-made salve. Bill got up, watched me anointing the cayuse's hide, walked around him, and asked, "How'd you like to trade for my nag?"

"Ask Mac," I advised him. "It's Mac's pony."

"Well, what say, Mac? My pony's a good beast, if he is thin."

"I should say he is, and mine's fat," returned Mac. "What boot will you give?"

I left them haggling, and went over to MacLeod's cart, near which, seated on the ground, feet against feet, were a couple of chaps pulling on a round stick held between them. At a given signal they would settle back, to see which could lift the other off the ground—something like a tug-of-war.

Bill sauntered over and remarked, "I could pull the two of you."

We looked him over. He was a square-made fellow weighing about a hundred and ninety-five pounds, and not over five feet nine in height. The boys ignored his challenge, but Bill was out to make an impression. To MacLeod he said:

"I can pull that cayuse to a standstill," indicating an Indian pony, grazing near.

Donald laughed. "Maybe you can and maybe you can't."

"I'll bet you this shooting-iron," offered Bill, "against a slab of bacon, that I can out-pull that there dun horse." He called it "hawse".

Finally the wager was made. A collar was put on the horse, and as the tugs were short, a couple of stout lengths of shaganappi were fastened to the ends and the other ends tied round the ends of a single-tree. Bill took his lariat, doubled it up, placed the middle of it over his shoulder with the ends passed under his armpits in the same way as we used what we called tumplines.

He then got down on his hands and knees, the ends of his lariat were fastened to the single-tree, he dug three or four holes in the ground for footholds, told Fred Sache and me to sit on his back, putting our full weight on him, and called out, "All set!" A boy took the pony by the bridle, the word was given, the boy tried to lead the cayuse away, but, to our astonishment, he couldn't budge the man on his knees.

"Sit a little nearer my neck," commanded Bill.

I did so, and he then straightened out his legs, strained on the rope, and as sure as you're alive, the pony was pulled back a step or two, and once he got him going, he kept crawling away, dragging the horse off his feet. He out-pulled him fair and square for four or five feet, and was declared the winner. MacLeod paid up like a man, but said,

"If I had had sense enough to get on my pony's back, you couldn't have done the trick."

"Right you are," agreed Bill. "Don't let anyone fool you again."

This was a good stunt, and quite on the square. A horse can pull far more with a weight on his back than without, and so with Bill the weight on his back held him down. There is wonderful power in a man's legs.

Our new comrade, after breakfast next morning, helped us to hitch up. But when I was putting the collar on the sore-shouldered horse, he sang out,

"Heah! Lay-off. That there's my hawse!"

I glanced at McLatchie.

"That's all right," said he. "We traded last night. Put the little sorrel in the cart."

I just said, "You're the boss." Afterwards I found out that what Bill had claimed for the little animal was true in every particular. Bill stayed with us till about noon next day, then rode off. News of him caught up with us the following year, when we were traversing northern Montana, and explained some of his peculiarities.

And here is a type of the aboriginal Indian, found at that time all over the West, whether in Canada or the United States:

We were nearing Edmonton when a Cree Indian joined our party, with his squaw and papoose. From my former tales you will have gathered that the squaws were regarded chiefly as beasts of burden by their lords and masters. Indeed, nothing indicated more clearly the difference between the *Métis* and the full-blooded Indian, than his treatment of his womenfolk.

This poor woman had her little baby, and all the pots and kettles on her back, while Mr. *Napao* (Cree for Man)

walked jauntily along with only a blanket, a gun, a powder-horn, and a bullet-pouch.

When I offered them a prairie chicken I had shot, he handed it to the squaw. When the sun grew hotter, he tossed his blanket to her to carry. Soon he hung his powder-horn and bullet-pouch on her; and finally he handed her his gun. That gun was the last straw—for me. I took it, removed the shot-bag, powder-horn and blanket from the person of his spouse, flung them on the ground, and ordered him to carry them himself. He did so, surprisedly.

"Good boy, Jack!" cried one of our party. "But just watch out for the lazy brute!" However, we soon parted company, and I never saw that Cree again.

John's account of the journey continues:

We reached Edmonton in the early part of November. At that time, excepting for the Hudson's Bay Company store, there were only a few settlers along the river, and two or three miners who washed the river-bars in summer. I got a little square of gold from one of them, and had it made into a stick-pin when I went back East.

It was about November 11th that we crossed the river at Edmonton and ice was forming as we crossed. Next morning the river was frozen over, with here and there small patches of water showing where the cakes of ice had parted. While we breakfasted, a French-Canadian settler dropped in; he had a pair of skis and a pole, and said that he was going over to the Fort. We thought he was crazy, but no. . . . He had a cup of tea, stuck his feet into straps tacked on his skis and, with the pole in his hand, went over.

Now the day before we had forgotten to get a good supply of matches at the Fort, so I said, if *he* crossed safely, I could too. I cut the shaganappi that bound the pieces of a flat-sled together, tacked two pieces of it across the boards

for toe-holds, got a pole, and over I went. Maybe I wasn't scared! At times one part of my skis would be resting on one cake of ice, and the rear part on another, and clear water running over the centre of the ski. But I got over safely, secured my matches and other small things, slung them over my shoulder, and back I went to camp, thankful to kick off those improvised skis on *terra firma*. What crazy stunts we did in those days—but our blood was not so thin then as it is now!

That same day we headed for the Bow River country, for reports had reached us that the buffalo were plentiful in that section. Our carts were heavily laden, so going up the steep hill at the river bank, we doubled up by tying a rope to a horse's tail with a slip knot, giving the other end a couple of half-hitches round the end of the shaft of the cart in which another horse was hooked; then, on our mounting the lead animal, they went together up the hill. A spotted steed that was a little balky we used as a lead horse, and I was on his back. When the word was given, he started too suddenly, with such a jerk that he actually pulled all the hairs of his tail out by the roots! He didn't seem to mind it much, but was useless as a lead horse for some time.

We hired a half-breed named Munro as guide to the Bow River country. He had carts and horses of his own and a young Cree Indian in his employ.

A few days later, at Pipestone Creek, we found ice an inch thick. Tom Isbister and I took axes and broke a way across, but in so doing we got soaked to the waist. What a night that was! We camped a few miles from the creek on a rather high trail, fearing the hollows in case of more snow, as our carts were heavy. Tom and I stripped to the buff after supper, hung our wet clothes over a rope strung

across the tent-poles, and turned in together, Mac and Fred on the other side of the fire.

Tom had taken the precaution to tuck another pair of pants-into-bed with him, but I hadn't. About one o'clock in the night a blizzard blew up—not what easterners call a "blizzard", but a regular corker for November—and whiff-bang! away went our tent, "clean and clever". We cuddled up, Tom and I, and lay snug and warm, but, if we moved an inch, the snow sifted in on us. *It wasn't much* below zero, but by morning the wind was keener. We lay quietly, but all at once Tom grabbed his extra trousers from under the blankets, drew up his feet, and shot the coverings off us, leaving me stark naked in a howling blizzard.

Tramping furiously through the snow to the cart that held my dunnage, I got into dry clothes and hoofed it to Munro's tent, set in the hollow, as his carts were comparatively light. Breakfast over, we found the horses huddled together in the lee of a clump of bushes. We knew they wouldn't stray far, so we pitched our tent again, started a fire, and made ourselves as comfortable as we could.

The next day was sunny, and tempted us forth, but bad weather set in, and after a few days' travel, we *hived up* in a small clump of cottonwood, birch and scrub oak, built us a shack and dared Winter to do his worst.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### WINTER 1874-5

**I**N view of the fact that the bison were due to disappear almost completely within the next two or three years, it is strange that they were present in such overwhelming numbers during this season of 1874-5. Having travelled so far to the west, John's party, well supplied with "truck" for their trading, were now within the forest belt towards which *les animaux* herded in winter. In a letter written November 9th, 1934, John made a note with reference to the buffalo.

In the fall they marched steadily towards the wooded section of the country, and during the winter of 1874-5 they were so numerous in the Bow River district, that a hunter and trader, Livingstone by name, who had his shack in the woods, several times heard them scratching themselves against the corners of his hut, upon the logs of which they left strands of hair to testify to their presence. Next spring robes were down in price on account of the big kill that winter. We met Livingstone later, at the Marias River.

The following recital of John's activities during this lively season, includes what he calls his "most interesting and intimate glimpse into Indian home life".

It was December when we got into our shack. Early in January I left camp with a couple of flat-sleds and three horses to go trading. Munro's young Indian came with

me a part of the way. There were bison in abundance and we got two of the animals. After the lad's return to Munro, I went on my way. I was becoming acquainted with the winter habits of the buffalo, saw them grazing, pawing the deep snow away, and feeding on the thick grass or rushes underneath. Also, I became acquainted with the ingenious Indian method of driving the beasts into a corral built of stakes and brush, somewhat in the shape of a fan. Bows and arrows were generally used to despatch the trapped animals.

From one camp to another I moved, doing a fairly good trade. Often, when sleeping out during these trading days on the trail between camps, I watched the great northern lights streaming up to the zenith—a marvellous sight. Finally I arrived at Buffalo Lake, ninety miles south of Edmonton, where I made my headquarters for the remainder of the winter.

This camp was remarkable in one particular. Former acquaintances turned up there in the most surprising manner. The first man I encountered was my old friend, Louis Marion, who insisted that I should make his shack my home. Then I met Little Dog, that debonair Bungay, also my old friends Addison McPherson and Charley Smith, who helped me bale my robes with their press, and Corbett (or Cuthbert) McGillis, well known to students of plains life, at the marriage of whose daughter Mélanie to McPherson I was shortly to act as witness.

The Cree bride of a couple of years previous was on hand too, with her Blackfoot husband. I visited their lodge in search of furs but got nothing just then. She had a sturdy little rascal of a papoose just beginning to toddle, and bound to be bilingual as he learned to lisp the tongues of father and mother.



John's old comrade of Fort Garry days, now Sergeant-Major S. B. Steele of the newly formed North-West Mounted Police, wintered at Edmonton, but the two did not meet during John's very brief visit to the fort in November, although Steele encountered MacLeod, of whom he speaks as "a fine fellow, one of the characters of the early days in the North-West". Nor did the friends meet at Buffalo Lake when Steele was sent there early in January on the trail of an illicit still. Sir Sam describes the great camp of over 400 cabins, the lively dances, the feasts, and the trip through weather 56° below zero, the coldest long stretch on record, but his four days must have passed before John's arrival or during the absence now to be described.

The buffalo were plentiful. The snow was deep, and hunting easy in consequence. One day I was walking behind my first sled, when ahead of me on the trail I caught sight of two buffaloes, their backs towards me. I seized my gun and urged the lead pony to a trot. The wind was blowing from the animals towards me, as they disappeared over the hill. A horse will huddle up and turn his back to a storm, but a buffalo will head right into a blizzard—not that there was a blizzard just then, but a pretty stiff wind.

At the foot of the slope I halted my pony, when back over the hill came the two buffaloes on the run. On seeing me, they stopped like a shot. The leader, owning a splendid coat of fur, threw up his magnificent head, bellowed hoarsely, and plunged off the track into the soft snow, floundering away to my left in the two-inch crust, apparently trying to pass me and get back on the trail. They were not making much headway, but were striving desperately in three feet of snow.

You read about snow on the prairies being six feet deep, but this stretches the truth. There was as much snow in the North-West that year as ever I saw in eighteen years' experience there, and I'll swear that, except in spots, it was not more than three feet deep. In swales where there is anything to catch and hold the snow during a blizzard, it attains a depth of five or maybe six feet, but that cannot be called an average depth.

The three feet, taken with the crust, was deep enough for the beasts in all conscience. I watched my chance, and when not more than twenty rods distant, I fired. Down went the leader with a broken leg. Quickly throwing out the shell, I shoved another into the chamber—my Springfield was not a magazine rifle—took a shot at the other, and by good luck brought him down. Then, as I was in the act of leading my ponies over to where the big buffalo was floundering, two Indians appeared over the rise, walking on snowshoes.

Here was the cause of *les animaux* turning back on the trail. They had got scent and then sight of the Indians, who now approached my game. The going was hard for me, for I had no snowshoes, but it was not far. I put the quietus on the big animal—and now what? The Indians were Sarcees, so I couldn't understand a word they said. However, we all got out our knives, placed the buffalo, skinned and cut up the meat—then what? By means of signs, the Sarcees invited me to their camp, at no great distance. I nodded. We retraced our steps to the trail, a well-beaten track, branching right and left to various camps. After five miles or so, we struck off towards a belt of timber, and came suddenly upon three good-sized lodges.

From under the tent-flap of the first lodge, there popped a small urchin about three years of age, stark naked, his

round black eyes staring in wonderment. In again he popped, and out stepped a young squaw with a papoose in her arms. The matter of what to do was taken out of my hands. The squaw's brave—one of my new companions—spoke to her, and she vanished. At the same time he took the horse out of the shafts. I motioned my protest, but he pointed upwards; and sure enough a storm was brewing. So we let the horses go.

The creatures went a little distance and immediately began to paw. Under the snow there is grass as green as any grass that grows, blades from two to six inches long, and this accounts for Indian ponies, turned out poor at the beginning of winter, coming through fine and sleek in the spring—not smooth as to coat perhaps, but fat and ready to slough off the old hair at the first touch of warm sun. The same applied to the buffalo. The deeper the snow, the more green blades.

Inside the lodge the squaw was getting something to eat. We sat down, and puffed away at our pipes, while the little chap eyed me from behind his father's shoulder. No, no, he wouldn't come near me, just pulled back farther and peeked at me. I kept on coaxing, his father said something, and lifted him around. Slowly he approached till I caught him by the hand and placed him on my lap. He kept as still as a little mouse while I stroked his small arms and legs. His mother smiled her gratification.

Before the meal was ready, in came the chap who had helped to skin and cut up the buffalo, followed by a remarkably tall fellow with only one eye—but what an eye! Ginger blue! It bored into you and no mistake. He had several scars on his arm and chest, and I gathered that he had been in a furious fight. In fact they indicated as much

that evening, for the storm blew into a gale, and I was snowbound for three days.

A man gifted with any degree of imagination doesn't need to understand their speech, to take in what these Indians try to tell him. Their gestures are a language in themselves. Only a dullard could fail to interpret the tales they told through their inherent gift of mimicry, which included realistic imitations of the calls of this, that, or the other beast, bird, or other denizen of the wild.

It was a joy just to watch one old warrior relating his exploits in a band of bison. In response to a wave of his arm, and the simple word, "Mus-toos-wuk" you saw approaching a big herd of buffaloes. Another wave, and you saw them in motion. An undulating gesture, and there was the rider on his steed. An inflexible arm cleaves the air, and there is the rider forcing his way into a herd that makes way before him—expressed by two hands drawing apart. Then you see the madly-galloping beasts closing in, as he extends both arms, repeating "Mus-toos-wuk", with flexible fingers pointing in all directions. Glances to left, to right, and to the rear, plainly say that the still cantering rider is sizing up the situation.

But now one old arm is firmly extended, while the other touches his ear—"Psst!"—the arrow flies and the bow-strings twang. One limp hand collapses on the other, the warrior hangs his head, and the stricken prey has toppled over. Nimble gestures show the rider plying his quirt, shooting in the direction of the floundering buffalo, and then an up-and-down rhythm implies that he is riding on. Now two hands, forming a V-shape, show you that the band has divided where the bison fell, some to the right, some to the left, leaving a free passage back.

If you had been beside the old brave on that spectacular ride, you could not have seen it all more plainly. For there were great story-tellers among the Indians skilled in narrative-by-gesture, just as there are orators among the white people who captivate us by their speech.

*Mais, revenons à nos moutons!* The meal over, they rigged up a square, not unlike a quilting-frame, and drew one of the buffalo-skins taut. Then the squaw took a scraping-knife, and began to remove any pieces of flesh adhering, leaving it ready for tanning. She did this in an incredibly short time, smeared it over with hot grease, removed the tie-string, rolled it up and started on the other.

Meanwhile we went into One-Eye's tent, and looked over his furs. He had some splendid skins, and about fifteen robes, some good, some only fair. However, I took them all, and we returned to the other tent where I undid my bundles and paid for the lot.

To the last meal of fried steak I added a couple of bannocks, *galettes* of which I had half a dozen rolled up in my kit. They were the size of the frying-pan; we warmed them up, and the little chap, who stood between my legs as we ate, enjoyed his share tremendously. The wild wind raged throughout that bitter night, but we were well sheltered in the timber and quite snug. Till a late hour the four Indians sat around the fire and talked, while I wondered when I was going to get back to the Lake. The sound of the Cree tongue is far more pleasant than the guttural, throaty tones of the Blackfoot, who seems to hurl his words at you. And certainly Cree was smooth and easy, compared with the constant twitter of these Sarcees—and yet that word does not quite describe it either.

Early next morning we were up. I looked after my cayuses, and then went over to the third tent, tapped on the

skin-flap, and entered the tepee. It was rather dark, but as I grew accustomed to the dim light I could hardly believe my eyes, for, sitting near the fire with some needlework in her hands, was a figure I first took to be a white woman. She had blue eyes, hair of a copperish hue, and, though not "as pretty as a picture" was undeniably good-looking.

She nodded to me. "A bad storm!" she said.

I was so astonished that I could only mutter "yes".

However, I found that she could speak only a little English. She had been to a mission school down in the Bow River section of the country. I supposed that her father was a white man, and her mother a Sarcee squaw; but afterward I heard her story, and this was not the case. Her mother was a Piegan who had married an American trader, a man who, when in liquor, abused his wife in the most terrible manner. One-Eye was the brother of this unfortunate Indian woman, and when he came to the assistance of his sister on one of these occasions, there was such a set-to between the brothers-in-law, that the red man lost his eye, and the white man his life.

One of a trio of sisters, this white squaw whose acquaintance I had just made, married a young Sarcee buck, and she, her uncle and his wife, had thenceforth thrown in their lot with the Sarcee tribe.

The husband entering shortly, we looked over his robes and furs, which were exceptionally fine. I bargained for the lot, we tied them up in bundles and carried them over to the other tent, where I produced my wares and paid him, throwing in a bead necklace for his wife, as I had in the case of One-Eye's squaw. He was going away quite satisfied, when I called him back, and gave him to understand that I wanted to pay him something for helping me with the buffaloes the day before.

As he was quite a dandy, I gave him brassware for his long plaited hair, some vermilion, and a fine big kerchief, and he went away highly pleased.

Meanwhile the squaw in whose tent I was staying, worked busily at the two skins we had brought in. Fastening a piece of iron hoop to a lodge pole, she drew the skin back and forth through it, now and again sprinkling hot grease on it to soften it. Then she would fold and roll it up and work at the other one, so that by night they were fairly pliable.

Darkness again and still no cessation to the wind and drifting. By now the little boy was my chum, and would stand between my legs, looking up into my hairy face—a stranger to the razor for weeks—with his unblinking black eyes. Now and again the little beggar would shoot out of the tent in his bare feet. His mother had thrown a short coloured cotton shirt over him, but not another stitch of clothing had he on.

Again the Indians talked far into the night. My tiny pal fell asleep in my arms. When I spread my robe and prepared to turn in, the little rascal looked so engaging, and at the same time so wistful, that I motioned him to lie down beside me. I drew the robes over us, he cuddled up in my arms, and soon both of us were in the Land of Nod. A novel experience for me, and one that occasioned merriment later—my sleeping with this little brave.

Next morning the wind abated, and I made ready to leave. I didn't do much bargaining with the Indian whose tent had sheltered me, but bought or traded for his peltries and robes at his own price. I paid the woman for her work on my two skins, made both of them some presents, gave my last bannock to the small warrior, lashed my furs

on the two sleds, hooked up my ponies and shortly after noon got under way.

The going was good once I struck the trail, the wind having swept it clear of snow, and just as the sun was setting, I reached my wintering-place at Buffalo Lake. I loosed my ponies, and Louis helped me unload. He was more than surprised at the fine peltries I had got, and delighted with the fresh meat for his own supply was running short. It was mighty lucky for me that those two Indians turned up just in the nick of time to assist me with those buffaloes. Without them I would have been in a quandary.

At Louis' suggestion, I snipped little pieces off my robes, before I took them next day to an Indian to have his squaw finish tanning them. In this way one could guard against the substitution of inferior skins.



## CHAPTER XXV

### FRESH FIELDS AND PASTURES NEW

THE spring sun of 1875 and his attendant winds made a tremendous assault on the Canadian plains and the terrain east of the Rockies. They tore off the white snow-blankets, broke up the sheets of ice, and beat the mattress of Mother Earth till dust-like mists arose and vanished in the blue above. All the Seven Sleepers of the animal and vegetable kingdoms were soon awake—and none more active than the human creatures, red or white, who hastened hither and yon on their respective errands. Settlers turned to the tasks before them, winter camps disbanded as by magic, and along the trails drifted bands of Indians or *Métis*, watchful of weather signs and greedy for game. John was left waiting for his comrades to rejoin him.

I was left absolutely alone. But for me the great camp at Buffalo Lake was deserted. The plains hunters and Crees had left for the prairies, and early spring of 1875 was in the air. I had no carts—otherwise I would myself have set off for the Bow River—so I had to wait till Tom Isbister and Fred Sache came along the trail.

It was eerie there by that great sheet of water. After the laughter and chatter, the crowding and gambling and haggling and hoarse shouting, it was strange to have only sun, wind, rain, and wild life for company.

The boys arrived on a Sunday. I remember very well. I was sleeping and was awakened by the sound of loud talking and the rattle of carts. I sprang out of my tent to see the boys driving past about a quarter of a mile away, less maybe. They didn't know I had a tepee, as I had none when I left them, and thought it was some Indian's tent. I shouted and waved my hands, and they turned and drove up. Maybe I wasn't glad to see them!

We loaded up and set forth, crossed the Red Deer and Bow Rivers, and arrived at Father Scollen's mission post on the other bank of the Bow. Next morning, at Father Scollen's request, I saddle-broke a couple of bronchos for him, a beautiful big dark chestnut stallion and a fine gray mare. We stayed there a day, and then left for Fort Benton where we intended selling our robes and furs. Father Scollen accompanied us for a day, and then went ahead as he had no loads. He too was headed for Benton.

Steele mentions this Father Scollen as an important factor in preserving law and order, smoothing out tribal entanglements during the treaties, and reducing the dangers of drink. And Scollen was only one of the heroic men by whom, from north to south, and from east to west, the untamed Canadian territories were tended and comforted. They were as much at home in the saddle as in the pulpit, and their influence made itself felt at the most unexpected times and in the most unexpected places.

Once, far away in the wilds, John Kerr, straying some miles from the camp of the half-breed hunters, came suddenly on a small lodge from which he heard the familiar strains of *There's a land that is fairer than day*. Sung in English to the well-known tune, it drew him to the cabin door. There he found a white man from the Southern

States, whose young Indian wife, daughter of a Blackfoot chief, was dying of tuberculosis. The couple had met at Morleyville, the mission of the Rev. George McDougall, where the girl had learned to speak English. They had come under the good man's influence, and their marriage had been profoundly happy. Now they had to part, and in John they found a sympathetic friend. Rendering what little aid he could, he returned the next day, only to find the young husband digging a grave. In a few short years, their beloved missionary lost his own life—frozen to death in a particularly cruel blizzard.

John never finished his trip to Fort Benton in the wake of Father Scollen.

It was an important trading-post in Montana. The big traders there, I. G. Baker & Company, contracted for much of the work on the first N.W.M.P. forts as indicated in *Scarlet and Gold*. Charley Conrad, whose name will be found on the map of Montana, was an important member of the firm.

One day as we travelled along we met a huge train of wagons and carts. The wagons were piled high with goods, and two or three were fastened one behind the other, with eight yoke of oxen hitched to the front wagon. A man rode alongside with a long whip and drove or guided the oxen. It all looked very like the old circus trains with six and eight horses pulling chariots in the parades—only there was no driver sitting holding a lot of lines in his hands. At that date these wagons looked as big to us as motor moving-vans would to-day. Remember, this was 1875.

This train proved to be in charge of Charley Conrad himself, and it contained goods for trading-posts at Forts

Whoop-Up and Standoff, and for small traders scattered all over the land from Fort Benton to the Rockies.

Well, we outspanned together, had dinner and a friendly chat, and shortly began to hook-up. We were ready before they were, and watched them getting their teams together. We had three extra horses and I was sitting on the little sorrel when one of Conrad's men came and looked my pony over, then went back and whispered to Conrad.

Conrad shook his head, and said, "You're dreaming, man."

But the chap persisted, and both men returned to me, Conrad closely inspecting the pony. Then he asked,

"Where'd you get that hawse?"

I told him it was McLatchie's, and that he had got it from a stranger in a trade the year before.

"What did I tell you?" exulted the driver.

The trader asked me to dismount, examined the saddle-marks, and announced, "Yes, I guess you're right."

They asked plenty of questions about the party we had got the pony from, what he looked like, how he was dressed, where he was headed for. We gave what information we could, which wasn't much, but Conrad said,

"That was Bill Ewing, all right, the d---d fool!"

It seemed that Bill had passed through Benton the previous year, after skinning out from Butte, Montana, where he had been in a livery and transport business with a partner named Adams. Bill believed that he had killed Adams, for in dissolving their partnership they had quarrelled. Both had pulled guns and fired. Adams slumped over and Bill, believing him dead, took fright, and pulled out on the back of a big dun-coloured mule which he rode as far as Benton, where he had traded for the little sorrel. Adams was found on the floor of his office, badly but not fatally hurt. He

explained how the shooting took place, and assumed as much of the blame as he put on his partner. Butte was pretty wild at that time, and no move was made to go after Bill, especially as Adams got better.

I never heard of Bill again, but apparently "Ewing" was the name he had gone by at Butte. In 1887, when I was working on what was then the St. Paul, Minneapolis and Manitoba Railway (afterwards called the Great Northern) grading an extension of the line from Devil's Lake to the coast, I made enquiries at Benton, and later on at Great Falls—but I never chanced on any news of him. I did not go as far as Butte, no further than Great Falls, in fact. My contract ended at Milk River.

But to return. Conrad wanted to trade for the sorrel, but McLatchie decided to keep him. The trader set off for the west, while we headed for the Missouri. When we reached its tributary, the Marias River, which is about as far to the south of the international boundary as Fort Macleod is to the north, we stopped at the store of a small trader for the night.

The next day was Sunday. Having heard that a fur-trader named Livingstone was camped about a mile away, and that he was returning from Benton, we set out for his tent to ask after the markets at the big post. We were walking four abreast, McLatchie, Fred, Tom and I, when we saw what we took to be a small tree-limb about three and a half feet long, lying across the road. Just as we came up, the supposed stick moved. With a yell Tom and I jumped over it—a good, big, healthy rattlesnake. It wriggled into a bed of cactus, we killed it with stones and sticks, and then went on to Livingstone's camp.

He told us robes were not bringing anything at Benton, and advised us strongly to turn back and make for Winnipeg, which we subsequently did.

Meanwhile we retraced our steps to the spot on the Marias River where we had spent the night. The trader was sitting in the doorway of his store, white as a ghost, his back against the door-jamb, his gun across his knees.

"What's the matter?" we chorussed, and he replied that he had shot a rattlesnake, and that he was waiting for its mate to come along, as they always travelled in pairs. When we told him about the one we had killed, he came with us to the cactus-bed, fished out the dead snake with a stick, and said,

"That's it, all right. Let's go back and have a drink."

So we returned. He put his gun away, and produced a bottle. Mac and Fred partook, but Tom and I declined. That snakes went in pairs, was news to us, at least to me.

We headed for the Land of the Maple next day. Soon we re-crossed the line, and were travelling east when the food problem became pressing. We were in that belt of country between the big game and the small game, and for about a week we had had nothing to eat except pemmican which, although life-sustaining, becomes monotonous when entirely unaccompanied by other food.

We were more than ready to welcome any change, and for two meals we ate skunk, but two sufficed to assure us that Providence never intended skunk to be placed on the bill of fare. Then we had a stroke of luck, for, as we wound along, one cart behind another, two of the ten only partially loaded, we noticed some white fungi along the trail. On examination we decided that they were mushrooms. We stopped our carts, yanked off our shirts, tied up the sleeves and necks, and filled them with these edibles, pretty soon piling up one of the partially-loaded carts with the fungi.

That day, and for two days after, we lived on mushrooms—nothing else, except the pemmican-grease we fried

them in. We surely had our fill of them, until one morning we killed an antelope, which lasted us till we got to Wood Mountain. There we found a small collection of log huts, all empty, their owners having gone to hunt buffalo.

One building had its door padlocked, and the Government coat-of-arms over the door. Fortunately we had a key that fitted the lock, so we opened the store-room—for such it was, the stores having been left there by the surveyors when laying out the boundary line—and gladly helped ourselves to canned goods, bacon and pork. Then we made out a bill for the same, enclosing it in an envelope, and left it on the counter. We retained a duplicate. Oh yes, that bill was duly paid to the Government's representative, when we arrived in Winnipeg, and explained our predicament.

The post at Wood Mountain, that crescent-shaped rise visible near the boundary in maps of the west, often furnishes the subject matter for reminiscences by Mounted Police of the early days of the Force. Sometimes it was deserted. During this summer of 1875, then on the wane, Fort Calgary was built in a spot selected by Inspectors Denny and Brisbois of the N.W.M.P. Where the city of Calgary now stands there was nothing visible to these two but a great black band of bison and one single tent, the property of a missionary priest.

Though news then travelled at a snail's pace, no doubt echoes of this event reached John and his companions, as their heavily-laden carts clanked along the trail. Five years, John kept thinking. I have been five full years in the West. I have been more than five years away from my home. When I sell these furs, thought John. . . .

## CHAPTER XXVI

### LAKE SUPERIOR BOILS OVER

THE Hudson's Bay Company relieved McLatchie and his three companions of their furs and peltries, and the party of four disbanded, their long months of close association forming a link that was not lightly broken.

John Kerr now turned eagerly towards the old home town of Perth, his parents, and the much shrunken family at Tara Cottage. The title of this chapter might almost be *Transportation Problems of the Seventies*, for the trip out, and the still more difficult return—John's chief topic—reveal the hardships which Canadian travellers had to endure, before the transcontinental railway took shape.

I secured passage on the boat for Moorhead, Minnesota, but on account of low water in the Red River, we got only as far as Fisher's Landing, from which point we were rattled along by stage to Moorhead, an upsetting experience for me. For I was uncommonly subject to *mal de mer*, *mal de wagon*, *mal de car*—or what have you? Luckily the stage was overloaded, and I stood on the rear steps all the way, in which situation I was at least inconspicuous.

We changed horses every fifteen miles, a regular custom on the overland stage journey from Winnipeg. At Moorhead I took the railway to Duluth, where I boarded the steamer *Keeweenaw*, for Port Huron; thence by rail to my



home. In those days the Great Lakes were *the* highway between East and West, and travellers waited impatiently for the opening of navigation.

That winter changed life's current for me. I arrived at Perth a bachelor of twenty-four; I departed a benedict of twenty-five, weighted with my share of the white man's burden.

In spinning the tale of his adventures, John always fought shy of personalities. In this thumbnail sketch of his home-coming, he has left out the pathetic joy with which his mother must have greeted him, the kindly welcome of his father and grandfather, and the excited interest of other members of the family.

The daily routine of Perth, after his life on the plains, doubtless seemed very orderly, somewhat narrow, and heavily humdrum. Sleeping in beds and eating at tables gave him a caged feeling; yet his desire to throw his histrionic talents into the role of the returned hero was hampered by a conviction that he must really, ~~after all, be~~ rather a rough sort of diamond.

However, there is no doubt that his general bearing appealed to Mrs. Mary Wade, a widow with one young son, who had made Perth her home. She was John's senior, but that was a matter of no import, as John's parents and grandparents had proved. And she was the possessor of a singularly sweet voice, still remarked upon long years after her death. If she had wielded no other charm—which most certainly was not the case—her voice alone would have captivated the young plainsman-trader. They were married early in 1876, but even marriage could not hold John in the East.

It was during that winter that I received a cheque from the Ontario Government for my portion of the reward offered for the capture of Lépine, over two years after the arrest had been made. The receipt of this sum, in conjunction with my new responsibilities, decided me to return in the spring of 1876 to the province of my adoption—Manitoba. So, taking a small load of horses, with harness, wagons, and other settlers' supplies, I entrained for Brockville, thence to proceed by water to Duluth. My wife was to follow me later in the season.

When we arrived at Windsor, then a small straggling town, we had to disembark, and were held up for a week or ten days, as the transportation company's boat was detained by ice on Lake Superior. That was a year for ice! Late in May it was incredibly thick in Superior's harbours; and in mid-June the steamer *Quebec* was imprisoned at Duluth for nearly a week by ice-fields ten miles in width. Finally the company chartered a vessel called the *City of Montreal*, a river-boat unsuited to the route, and in charge of a captain who had never made the trip up the lakes and knew nothing at all about lake navigation. However, a pilot was engaged; we loaded up, and away we sailed.

Bad weather hit us from the first, and the boat rolled and pitched horribly. Following my usual custom, I took a bottle of mixed pickles and some soda biscuits and hied me to bed, there to stay till the worst was over. A young chap from Perth, Tom McK—— by name, on his way to Winnipeg, was a godsend to me for he looked after my stock.

The *City of Montreal* dawdled along without mishap for some days—I, mostly sunk in my berth following up *mal de Huron* with *mal de Superior*, until one June morning I heard men rushing along the passage-way talking excitedly. I poked my head out and asked what was the matter.

"We're running ashore, that's what's the matter!" answered one; and the words were no sooner out of his mouth, than bang! she went, with a force that straightened me up in my bunk. I got up and went out, but you could see nothing except men with lanterns at the bow of the boat. The fog was so thick you might have carved it. Superior revels in fogs, as any sailor of the lakes will tell you.

I snatched up my lantern, and Tommy and I hastened to the horses. They were quietly munching hay, bales of which had rolled against them, for the ship's bow was away up on the rock, and her stern far down in the water. There was a mild panic among the passengers, till one of the officers assured them that "everything was all right, no danger at all".

But there we were, hard and fast on Lake Superior's northern strand, about thirty miles from Duluth. When the sun came out and the fog lifted we took stock of the situation. The bow was high upon the rocks, and how she escaped being smashed was a marvel, for the face of the cliff was practically vertical. The boat had apparently been carried in on a wave; had she struck the rock when in the trough, her bow would surely have splintered.

The captain and crew tried to back out, but couldn't budge. They took the anchor out in a boat, dropped it in the lake, then with the rope hitched to the capstan, set the donkey-engine to work and tried to drag her off, at the same time putting on full steam to back out—all to no avail.

Some of us then climbed down the bow of the vessel and felled a couple of good-sized trees, to use as derricks. No use! The *City of Montreal* had settled in Uncle Sam's domain, and refused to budge. We stayed there all day and

all night. Next morning we went ashore again and tried to leverage the bow up, using long saplings for levers, but we couldn't oust her.

Meanwhile the wind had increased to a gale, and the surf was running high and higher. Two of us volunteered to walk to Duluth for help, made ready and got some grub down on the shore—four of us were on the rocks at the time—when the captain hailed us, and asked us to watch if the boat moved when the next wave came in? We watched and, sure enough, the bow moved a little.

The captain then sent everyone to the stern of the boat, and told us to call out when the next breaker came rolling along. Pretty soon a mountainous billow obliged by dashing in, we howled in chorus, the captain gave the signal to back, the donkey-engine brayed lustily, the gigantic breaker lifted the bow—and back the *City of Montreal* slid into the water. What a cheer went up! But there we were—four of us—on shore. That captain surely owned a sardonic streak of humour!

A boat with three men in it was sent for us. They watched their chance and came in on a big surge; we clutched her and held on like grim death till the wave receded. And then there were seven of us high and dry! Or more correctly, high and *wet*. The mate who, with the boatswain, had come in the boat, refused to go back. The lake was viciously rough, and getting off that rock was an extremely ticklish matter. I built a fire, cut some boughs, and lay down to take what comfort I could, the mate remarking,

"You seem to know your business, young fellow."

I laughed and said I had roughed it often enough.

Just then a regular cascade came tumbling in, and all but sucked our boat back into the lake. We just caught her

by the skin of our teeth. We hauled her up higher and lay down by the blaze. Meanwhile the steamboat stood afar off making a wide circle, and finally whistled for us to come.

"Well boys," said the mate reluctantly, "we'll have to go, or they'll leave us."

We dragged the boat to the ragged edge of the rock, the crew got in, the rest of us, two on each side of her, held her steady; and when the next breaker arrived, shoved off, jumped in, and away they pulled. Fifty feet from shore a waterspout came tossing along. It bore us back till we were within fifteen feet of sheer rock—the mate yelling, "Pull, Bill—for God's sake, pull!" How they *did* pull, and the giant wave, returning, helped carry us away. Jove! My heart pounded. One moment we were on a foamy crest, the next deep in a trough, contorting ourselves to meet the watery onslaught. Superior was just relieving her pent feelings.

One chap—the one who had volunteered to walk with me to Duluth—cried, "I wish to God I'd gone by land!"

The steamer bore down upon us. The captain had a man standing at the bow with a coil of rope ready to throw.

"Don't touch that rope!" yelled the mate. "Does the man take us for blankety-blank fools?"

The steamer came slowly past; the man threw the rope which landed in the boat. We didn't touch it, but kept straight on. The steamer turned, came back, pulled alongside at a different angle, and on the leeward side cast over a rope, which we caught. A ladder was lowered, and up we went.

Tommy was at the rail, clutched me by the hand, and helped me gain a foothold. Then he hugged me, crying, "Thank God, Jack, you're safe!" I surely was a lucky boy to be on board the old tub again.

However, we weren't in Duluth yet—not by a long shot. For hours we threaded ice floes that packed ever closer together, till the captain called a halt. There we were in sight of Duluth, and there we stayed for two days. All around us were ships in the same predicament.

On the third day we sighted a vessel poking along nearer the shore than we were, where the water was more open. The captain levelled his glasses and made out the name *Auld Scotia*. Why this touching title should act as an irritant, I know not; but he swore by his Maker that he wouldn't let that boat beat him to Duluth!

Accordingly, we backed water a little, then went ahead a little, then back again. Finally, we'd drive full steam ahead at a big cake of ice. Up would go the bow on the cake, and just as we thought we were going to be hard and fast again, the cake would part, back she'd slide, then full steam ahead through the crack. From then on, it was bumpety-bump, with never a stop, till we drew up at Duluth. How the old tub ever battled those young icebergs for fifteen miles is a problem. Each crack had me thinking, "We're going down this time for sure." But we won through all right, and the *City of Montreal* beat *Auld Scotia* to it, by a few minutes only.

I never want another such experience. Two days on the rocks, and two days among cold, cold ice-floes—Superior hitting on all twelve!

But I left my horses lunching in the lower regions of the *City of Montreal*. The tale of our subsequent movements sheds further light on those good old times. We stayed in Duluth just long enough to get our stock and effects loaded on the cars, bundled in ourselves, and left for Moorhead, then the end of steel. The spring of '76 was very wet, and the lands and farms were covered with water. At Moorhead we unloaded our belongings, re-loaded into

our wagons, and set off along the stage route of 225 miles to Winnipeg.

I had a four-horse team hitched to my wagon, and led the way, through floods at times up to the horses' bellies. Of the first hundred miles, quite fifty were under water, through which we could only walk. Near Pembina there was less water, but mud, mud, a sea of mud, all the way from the border to Winnipeg. On our arrival our stock was a sight, and so were we—but it did me good to see again the walls of old Fort Garry on the Assiniboine. I felt indeed like one returned from "wandering on a foreign strand". How Winnipeg had shot ahead in those eight or nine months!

I sold my stock, keeping only one team. Work was abundant. Hustle and bustle everywhere—people arriving daily in scores. Money to burn, remittance-men always in evidence, houses springing up like mushrooms. The boom came later in 1881-2, but in 1876 Winnipeg was humming. The old *International*, wooden-planked stern-propeller, brought in boat-loads every trip. The stage-coach was always crowded. Winnipeg was no longer a hamlet; in the short space of five years it had the population of a city.

Yes, civilization was on the way. Another decade and Lake Superior as the main path of westward travel would find a rival in the new railway from coast to coast. And passengers, deep in the cushioned seats of heated cars, would watch the waters ramp and rage, merely remarking, "Look at those white-caps, will you? It's surely rough on old Superior to-day!"

While Canadian lake-crews were grappling with the elements, American military authorities came to grips with the problems thrust upon their western territories by the

cruel and vengeful Sioux. Great marauding bands of these Indians made life miserable for sparsely-settled sections of Montana and Dakota territories.

It was on June 25th, 1876, that General Custer made his "last stand" on the Little Big Horn River in Montana, and, surprised by overwhelming numbers of the redskins, fell with all his supporting cavalry in what is known as "The Custer Massacre". Sitting Bull, with Chiefs Spotted Eagle, Little Knife, Black Moon, The Man Who Crawls, and hundreds of their followers, escaped into Canada, to the neighbourhoods of Fort Walsh and Wood Mountain, where they remained for some years, a by no means welcome addition to the population, and a reminder to the Federal Government that more Indian Treaties were in order.

Sitting Bull liked Canada. He sat right down at Fort Walsh, and announced that the commission sent by the United States to induce him to return could "go to the devil". "I will stay here," he cheerfully assured members of the North-West Mounted Police, cordially shaking hands with them. The Force employed a good deal of finesse in dealing with Sitting Bull—perhaps the most ponderous, obstinate and blood-thirsty savage in American history. He might really have menaced Canada but that some of his sub-chiefs, and dozens of his warriors were quietly induced to desert him; and when his power was sadly broken, and he had given up hope that the Canadian Government would make terms for him with the United States authorities, he left the Wood Mountain district in 1881 for his former haunts.



## CHAPTER XXVII

### THE INDIAN TREATIES OF 1876

WHEN June had given place to July, John was called to an interview at the Grand Central Hotel on Fort Street, Winnipeg, by a member of the Manitoba Government who loomed large in the affairs of the province. This was the Hon. James McKay who loomed large not only politically, but physically as well. He weighed about four hundred pounds and, as one of the chief spokesmen in the business of making treaties with the aboriginal tribes, no one could have had greater weight. A half-breed himself, he spoke Cree like a native, and was well acquainted with the habits and peculiarities of the red men.

Treaty Number Six was shortly to be consummated at Forts Carlton and Pitt, and that Mr. McKay should have called in John's aid for the Government party during these important proceedings goes to show that the lad from Perth had proved his usefulness in several fields of endeavour. Moreover, McKay knew that John was familiar with the places named; having spent months with the *Métis* plains-hunters at St. Laurent, about twenty miles from Carlton; while, as for Fort Pitt, his trading operations had acquainted him with that neighbourhood.

Mr. McKay's fellow-commissioner was Hon. W. J. Christie, formerly chief factor for the Hudson's Bay Company, with a long experience of western territorial complications, and a sure insight into the temper of the tribes about to be dealt with. All details pertaining to John's duties were settled at an interview with Mr. McKay.

I was to provide my own team and democrat, and would be paid so much *per diem* from the time of departure until our return. I was also to furnish provisions for myself and team at my own expense.

On July 27th we set forth, Lieutenant-Governor Alexander Morris and Mr. Christie in a carriage driven by a half-breed named Joseph Genton—Pierre Levallier acting as guide. Dr. A. G. Jackes, secretary to the Commissioners, rode with me, and a most companionable gentleman he was. Mr. McKay left a little later than we did, in a buggy he had had built to suit his ample proportions.

This was the last time that I travelled the red man's hunting-ground west of Winnipeg, and again I was struck by the rapid advance in settlement. Farm buildings appeared here and there on the open prairie. It was only after we left Fort Ellice behind that I seemed to feel at home. And even then, not a single buffalo darkened the plain. As if by magic, they had vanished.

At Fort Ellice, about two hundred and twenty-five miles from Fort Garry, on August 4th, we met some Sioux Indians who detained us for several hours, but we proceeded to The Crossing on the South Saskatchewan—eighteen or twenty miles from Carlton—before encountering any real opposition. Here a large number of traders' and freighters' carts were waiting their turn to cross on the scow. Before our arrival a small band of Saulteaux had tried to stir up enough

trouble at The Crossing to prevent the Commissioners from making the passage. These Saulteaux, who had made common cause with Chief Beardy of the Willow Crees, in an effort to disrupt the treaty, first worked upon the half-breeds without success. Now they turned to the Plains Crees, who also were unresponsive. Finally one of the latter pointed to the Saskatchewan:

"Can you stop the flow of that river?" he asked.

The Saulteaux answered "No". Whereupon the Cree said, "No more can you stop the progress of the Queen's chief."

That settled the matter. A Chippewa trader, Kiss-o-ways by name, who was using the scow, offered it to the Commissioners, and we crossed in safety.

Comparing John's story with other records, it is plain that Chief Beardy, or the Hairy Man, gave a perfect exhibition of the childish obstinacy and arrogance often linked with the Indian character. Steele notes that "Beardy's demeanour had been so unfriendly that Inspector Walker (N.W.M.P.), had to send an escort to bring the Lieutenant-Governor and his colleagues from the south branch of the Saskatchewan to the fort." Beardy had even sent a messenger to try to find out, in advance, the terms of the treaty. John remarks on the arrival of the police escort, and adds that Beardy's message actually contained a statement to the effect that "he had not given the Governor leave to meet his Indians anywhere except at Duck Lake, and that they would meet him only there". He pretended that it was revealed to him in a vision that Duck Lake was to be the setting for this treaty!

However, the head chiefs of the Crees, Mist-ow-as-is and Ah-tuk-uk-koop, who were reasonable braves, had decided for Fort Carlton, and the main body of the Saskatchewan River Crees, with their headmen, were already assembled there. From their ranks they sent out as emissary a young warrior who now presented a letter of greeting from the leaders of his nation.

This ceremony neatly concluded, the Governmental party left The Crossing, attended by their police escort, and, as John relates,

At Duck Lake, less than halfway between The Crossing and Carlton, we ran into Kah-mæ-yes-too-weags, Chief Beardy himself. No doubt impressed by the men of the Force, he and his followers finally made a great ado. Extending their right hands to the skies, they joined in invoking a blessing from the Great Manitou on the bright day that had brought the Queen's messenger to see them. Thereafter, another emissary from the main band at Carlton stepped forward and shook hands with the Governor for all the Plains Crées.

Lawrence Clarke, the Hudson's Bay Company factor at Fort Carlton, had prepared comfortable quarters for Governor Morris, Mr. Christie and Dr. Jackes, Mr. McKay preferring to camp by himself, about four miles from the fort. On the evening of our arrival, the two head chiefs paid their respects to the Governor.

The site of the treaty was splendidly chosen, about a mile from the fort. On a rise of ground the Governor's tent was pitched. Across the tree-dotted plain some two hundred and fifty lodges of the main Indian camp were gay with ribbons streaming from the lodge-poles. Between

these and the Governor's tent was a clear space, and to the west was the North Saskatchewan, its further shore fringed with timber. The Union Jack floated to the breeze from the Governor's quarters. Beyond the Indian encampment were the tents of traders assembled to do business with the red man when the treaty dues were paid.

On the morning of August 18th, the Governor, with Commissioners Christie and McKay, Dr. Jackes, and Peter Erasmus (interpreter), were ushered to the grounds by a special escort of police, preceded by a band. The Indians, advancing in a semi-circle, gave an outstanding exhibition of horsemanship. They had been painted with spots and stripes, to produce the utmost effect of ferocity. Dismounting, they then marched, their headmen leading, to the Government tent.

Ably supported by the two Commissioners, Governor Morris, tall, straight and dignified, in cocked hat, gold braid and lace, looked every inch a representative of the Great White Mother. Chiefs, headmen and councillors, equally erect and stately, heads up and eyes focussed on the waiting Governor, advanced to within fifty yards, and halted. Meanwhile, mounted warriors performed spectacular feats at top speed, brandishing and firing off their guns, to the beat of tom-toms and the chanting of songs.

Then began the Dance of the Stem, often described by chroniclers of Indian ceremonial. A long-stemmed pipe, gorgeously carved, was borne in front of the chiefs by a brave who directed the stem to the four cardinal points, drawing his fingers along its length. Stroking the Stem they called this, and when the representatives of Her Majesty had caressed the pipe in like manner it meant that the friendly advances of the red men had been met in a like spirit.

Peter Erasmus introduced the chiefs and headmen. The Governor, in his quiet manner, delivered a short address, then outlined the terms of the treaty. I quote a few words of his speech:

"I have been for four years Governor of Manitoba and these territories, and from the day I was sworn I have taken the Indian by the hand and never let it go. We are not here as traders; I come to you, children of the Queen, to try to help you. When I say Yes, I mean it. When I say No, I mean it too.

"I will do here as I have done on former occasions. What I will promise, and what I hope and believe you will take, is to last as long as that sun shines and yonder river flows."

The Indians requested leave to consider the proposals made to them, and the meeting was duly adjourned to the next day.

On the evening of August 18th, the great camp was a rainbow of colour, a whirlwind of motion, and a babel of sound. Squaws in blankets of blue, yellow, orange, green, striped with black, flitted from tepee to tepee; and a large body of the North-West Mounted Police arriving that evening from Swan River, *en route* to Macleod, added the scarlet and gold of the Force to a picture already barbaric in hue.

There was my old comrade and barracks bed-fellow of 1870, Sam Steele, fresh from his duties as Chief Constable at Swan River. And jovial was our greeting! Darting here and there in the crowd, I found old cronies, Gabriel Dumont, his brother Eli, others of the *Métis* plains hunters. Finally I wandered out to where the main body of Indian ponies were herded, beyond the spot where the horses of the police force had been picketed. My own team I had hobbled, and let run at will, bringing them up morning,

noon and evening, for their feed of oats. Captain, one of my beasts, was a rascal given to biting when the occasion offered. This night he jumped, open-mouthed, towards an intruding red man, who sprinted away at full speed. I administered a trimming but Captain was given a wide berth when the story of his misdoings got around.

On Saturday, August 19th, the Commissioners and Indians again met, the Governor re-stating the terms they were empowered to offer; and again the chiefs asked and obtained time to consider the proposals. *Mist-ow-as-is* took the Governor by the hand, saying, "When a thing is thought of quietly, that is the best way." Accordingly, he asked "this much, that we go and think of his words".

As the bands were being provisioned by the Government, the Indians strove to lengthen proceedings, and asked for a good many delays. They emphasized the fact that the buffalo, their main food supply, were fast disappearing, and claimed that they were apprehensive as to their future, but were thankful that, as one of them put it, "a new life was dawning on them".

The following day was Sunday, August 20th. Rev. John Mackay held a service that was largely attended, and in the afternoon spoke to the Indians fluently in Cree. Father Scollen of Bow River also conducted a service at the Indian camp. I met the good priest later, and was told that the two horses I had broken to saddle for him the previous year had been useful as buffalo-runners, particularly the chestnut stallion.

For three more days the Governor had to exercise patience with the red men, and reasoned long with them. In his report to Parliament, the Hon. David Mills praised the tact of the Commissioners in "bringing the negotiations to a satisfactory issue". The picturesque chief Poundmaker

was one of the objectors. Little did I dream, as I saw him talking to Governor Morris, that in a few short years he would be taking a leading part in a rebellion. He was a fine-looking brave, with his hair neatly parted in the middle and long plaits of it bound round with fine brass wire hanging down each side of his face and neck and reaching well over his shoulders. Though failing to sign the treaty, Poundmaker was not troublesome. He was argumentative and very unreliable. But by nature many of the red men were treacherous.

On August 23rd, the Fort Carlton Indians signed, but Chief Beardy, who represented only a small group of Willow Crees, would not give his adhesion till the 28th. Even then he continued to be a stumbling-block in the negotiations, for he asked the Governor that instead of a red coat he be given a blue one. The Governor explained that many of the Queen's servants wore scarlet uniforms, and that all the chief's coats *he* had were scarlet, so Kah-mee-yes-too-weags finally accepted one of that hue.

The witnesses to this treaty were as follows:

(Signed) A. G. Jackes, M.D.

Joseph Genton

John A. Kerr

Pierre Levallier, His (x) mark

W. D. Jarvis, N.W.M.P.

While the negotiations were in progress and the Indians were being supplied with provisions, a small herd of long-horns had been brought over, and Mr. James McKay took pleasure in driving out to the herd each morning, and shooting from his buggy as many as were required for the day, leaving the skinning and cutting up to the natives. As the herd was wild, it required good marksmanship to



bring down the animals, but Mr. McKay, having had much experience in buffalo-hunting, was equal to the task.

A most useful man he was to the Governor, at whose request he made an address to the Indians that left no doubt whatever as to the provisions of the treaty. A few words will illustrate the tenor of his speech:

"My Friends: I wish to make you a clear explanation of some things you do not appear to understand. The Governor has told you that we did not come here to barter or trade with you for the land. . . . Now my experience has been that, as soon as the Governor and his Commissioners have turned their backs, some of you will say this thing was promised, and that the promise was not fulfilled, that you cannot rely on the Queen's representative, that even *he* will not tell the truth. While the fact is, the falsifiers are among yourselves.

"Now it must be understood, and it must be in writing, all that you are promised, and I hope you will not leave until every word that comes from us is thoroughly understood by you.

"We are not here to make a peace, as we would to hostile Indians, because you are the children of the Great White Queen, even as we are, and there has never been anything but peace between us. What you do not understand we will do our best to make plain to you."

We left Carlton on August 31st for Fort Pitt, arriving there on September 5th, the day appointed by the Governor—though it required haste. The proceedings at Fort Carlton had been unexpectedly protracted, and our time had been curtailed by a mistake on the part of the Indian guide, who took the wrong trail after we had crossed the Saskatchewan. I advised Dr. Jackes, whom I was driving, of this, but no heed was paid to my protest. I knew the right trail, as I had

been over it before, and I knew also that the track we were on led in the direction of Green Lake, for it was the very road I had helped the *Métis* of St. Laurent to build for the Hudson's Bay Company in the spring of 1873.

However, as it grew dark, a message came back to me from the Governor asking if I could set them on the right track. I said I could, took the lead, and turned off to the left, not quite at right angles, but diagonally, and after about two hours' travel, we hit the right trail, which we pursued for another hour before camping for the night.

Up to this time, although we had travelled together for a month, my presence had not been acknowledged by the Lieutenant-Governor, notwithstanding the fact that we both came from Perth and that he knew me. But when I set him and Commissioner Christie and their guide (Mr. McKay had gone on *via* Battleford to Fort Pitt) on the right path, I must say he was very profuse in his acknowledgment of my services.

An even more hearty reception awaited our party at Fort Pitt than had been accorded at Carlton for Chief Sweet Grass, and some of his Councillors threw their arms around Governor Morris, Dr. Jackes and Mr. Christie, kissing them on both cheeks. I won't swear that they liked it! The ceremonial proceedings were similar to those at Carlton. The setting was not quite so picturesque but, if anything, the display of equestrian skill by the Indians was better and bolder.

The negotiations at Pitt were begun on September 7th and Sweet Grass, one of the oldest and most respected of the Plains Cree Indians, took the leading part on behalf of his tribe. Governor Morris made a telling speech. He stressed the protection afforded to the Indians by the

Mounted Police, afterwards very distinctly outlining the terms of the treaty, to which the braves loudly assented.

On the 9th of September, the Indians again gathered at the treaty ground, when Ku-ye-win (The Eagle) addressed them, telling them "not to be afraid to speak their minds, that the Governor was to them as a brother, that what the Queen wished to establish through him was for their own good."

Old Sweet Grass again arose. His Indian name was Wee-kas-koo-kee-say-yin:

"I thank you," he said, "for this day, for what I have seen and heard, and I also thank the Queen for sending you. I am glad of your offers and I thank you from my heart. I speak this in the presence of the Divine Being. I accept of it gladly and take your hand to my heart. May this continue as long as the earth stands, and the sun shines, and the river flows.

"The great King, our Father, is looking upon us this day. He regards all the people equal with one another. He has mercy on the whole earth. He has opened a new world to us. When I hold your hands, and touch your hearts," suiting the action to the words, "let us be as one. Use your utmost to help me and my children."

This touching appeal affected all of us within hearing, and the loud clear tones of the interpreter carried to a great distance. Other chiefs spoke favourably. Medals and uniforms were distributed. The police band played *God Save the Queen*, and Mr. Christie proceeded to make the payments.

The Government party lingered a few days at Fort Pitt, to implement some of their promises, and to witness more of the Indian ceremonial.

Digging in the fertile soil of his memory, one day in March, 1935, John unearthed a few recollections of this pause in the proceedings, which have a personal interest. One evening, a circle of squaws performed a dance around a fire in the centre of a large tepee. Close to the entrance of the tent, sat Mr. Christie and Dr. Jackes watching the performance. John managed to find and don some beaded leggings, and a blanket which he draped upon his figure, over his head, and around a face painted to suit the occasion. He flattered himself he could not be distinguished from the dancing squaws, hopped into their circle, and imitated their gyrations. Even the red damsels were deceived at first, but they detected him before the turn was over, and laughed so immoderately that John suddenly made an elaborate bow to Commissioner Christie and Dr. Jackes and beat a retreat. Until that moment they had not recognized him. "The squaws thought it a good joke," said John, "but I'm not so sure the young bucks relished it."

The next day, when vaulting with a pole, John sprained an ankle. Secretary Jackes reverted to his customary role of medical adviser, and treated John so successfully that he was able to get about on the following day.

On September 13th the chiefs came to the fort to pay their respects, and to say good-bye. That sly fox, Big Bear, who alone did not sign the treaty—though later on he gave a verbal assent—stepped up and put in his oar, citing some objections which brought from Sweet Grass the advice:

"My friend, you see the Queen's representatives here. I think the Great Spirit put it into their heads to come to our help. I feel as if I saw life where I see the representative of the Queen. Let nothing be a barrier between him and you.

It is through great difficulty that this has been brought to us.

"Think of our children and those to come after. There is life and succour for *them*; say yes, and take his hand."

The Whitefish Lake chief said, "We have all taken it, and we think it is for our good."

Then Big Bear made a curious speech: "Stop, stop, my friends. I've never seen the Governor before, though I've seen Mr. Christie many times. I said, when the Governor comes I have a request to make, that he will save my neck from what I most dread, that is: the rope to be around my neck [hanging]. It was not given to us by the Great Spirit that the red man or the white man should shed each other's blood."

And this from the man who, nine years later, was to be foremost in the shedding of blood! His savage nature has been revealed in recent studies of those lurid times in 1885. As I remember him he was eternally in trouble, at one time wanting the half-breed hunters to join with him in a war against the Blackfeet.

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My first recollection of him dates back to one day when Louis Marion and I were eating with Gabriel Dumont in his tent. Big Bear, with a small band, rode into camp. Gabriel invited him to partake, which he did, but evidently he made some outrageous request, for Gabriel thundered out "Nemoia! No!" At this the unpleasant guest stalked out, pulling his blanket around him, and I asked Louis who he was. Said Louis, "Big Bear!" But the name meant nothing to me then.

Governor Morris assured Big Bear that no good Indian need be afraid of having a rope about his neck—nor any decent white man, either. Well, Big Bear escaped hanging, and only served a term in prison, whereas some of the lesser offenders got the rope.

"I ask God to bless you and your children. Farewell!" So the Governor addressed them all. The Indians responded by loud ejaculations of satisfaction. Sweet Grass and the other headmen elevated the Governor's hand towards heaven, invoking the blessing of the Great Manitou. I could never forget this scene; nor could anyone who witnessed it.

We left Fort Pitt for Battleford on September 13th, arriving on the 15th, but there were only a few Indians present, most of them being out hunting, so no treaty was made. Finally we set out from Battle River on September 19th for our long trip to Fort Garry, and reached our destination on October 6th, having covered in all about 1800 miles. I received \$4.50 per day from the Hon. James McKay for my services, together with a letter from him in which he expressed his satisfaction with the way in which I had performed my duties; also one from Dr. Jackes to the same effect. The Governor gave me \$20 for writing out four copies of the Treaty, so that my trip was not unprofitable.

During that long journey of two weeks and three days, from Battleford to Fort Garry, summer was fast giving place to autumn. The monotonous jog-trot of our horses favoured a condition of reverie. The changes that were manifestly coming could not but be uppermost in mind. The buffalo were certainly disappearing. How would this affect my *Métis* friends? I thought of Gabriel. Afterwards a rebel, he was then one of the finest half-breeds in the West. Unconsciously I had said a long good-bye to Gabriel. Never again would I see his homely face with the scraggly beard, or his stocky, thickset, square-shouldered figure. "A brave man, and a natural warrior," Longstreth calls him in *The Silent Force*, but nobody was thinking of war then.

The Indians had never greatly appealed to me, but there were jewels among them, loyal chiefs like old Crowfoot,

Star Blanket, and Mistowasis. The tribes as a whole had some pathetically child-like characteristics, revealed in their poetic outbursts and in the imagery that they constantly employed.

The scenes I had just witnessed provoked a question: if we whites had *not* come "to barter or trade for the land", then what exactly *were* we doing? Over a period of six years, seven treaties were made with the Indians. The provisions of the successive pacts varied slightly, but this treaty of 1876 was important on account of the extent of the territory ceded (approximately 121,000 square miles) and because of the character and size of the Indian population living within the confines of the same.

The indemnities granted the red man on submitting to the restrictions laid down for him, as regards land reservations and other rights, may be read in our handbooks of history: small initial sums of money, certain equipment in tools, livestock, seed, twine for nets, ammunition, medical supplies, promises of educational aid, and five dollars annual cash payment per head, with twenty-five dollars to each chief, and fifteen dollars to each headman or councillor not to exceed four to a band.

The Commissioners complained, in one case, that "the negotiations were difficult and protracted"; in another, that "it took five tedious days"; in another, "we had great difficulty owing to the excessive demands of the Indians".

Difficult negotiations! Excessive demands!

There are many aspects to this question: Did the red man get a square deal? My own opinion is perhaps of little consequence. I am but a scribe who can recall these scenes from actual experience. But the text "For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and from him that hath not . . ."—

one of the "hard sayings" of Scripture—seems applicable here.

It is true that past dealings with our Canadian tribes occupied a great deal of John Kerr's thought in his declining years. He even wrote an article casting the Indian as Esau selling his birthright for a mess of pottage, to a Government Jacob. It was quite ingenious, but he tore it up as he thought he had "overstressed the Scriptural analogy".

On other occasions he wrote—not alone of the Canadian tribes—"The natives were bamboozled from the start." "History shows that the Indians got the worst of it every time." He thought it a specious form of approach to the red men—as his remarks indicate—to camouflage our self-interested dealings with them as a sort of get-together policy. If the Indian was tricky, the white man should have set a clear example; and there was not enough humanitarianism behind our advances to justify this mode of approach.

Anyone who has been present at Treaty Days in the West, especially in long-past decades, or has seen the sad influence upon the "bloods" of bad habits in the white population, has some inkling of the tragic impact upon the native Indian of white supremacy.

It was always a relief to John to turn to the work of the faithful Christian missionaries among our red brothers, as "a cheerful note that brightens the whole refrain".



## CHAPTER XXVIII

### WESTERN KALEIDOSCOPE

SEVERAL surprises awaited John Kerr as he concluded his duties in connection with Treaty Number Six. Those boyish pranks at Fort Pitt probably reflected a conviction that his roving life must soon end and domesticity close in upon him. October was now a week old, and four months had elapsed since he had said farewell to his wife. Plans must be evolved as to her journey from the East, a house must be found and equipped. Such were the thoughts in his mind as he drew near the muddy little city of Winnipeg.

To his joy and amazement he found his Mary already domiciled in a small dwelling on Rupert Street, awaiting his return! Her young son had remained in the East, in care of an aunt, and Mary's whole energy was now employed in the absorbing duties of a pioneer wife.

Bent upon establishing a community of comfortable homes at the junction of the Assiniboine and the Red, settlers had undergone God knows what in the way of discomfort and privation. And there was still a quantity of spade-work to be done before their ambitions could be realized. "Spade-work" is an apt term, as much of the discomfort and labour was occasioned by the successive

upheavals of rich Red River mud which were necessary before the various services could be installed. The population, as in most pioneer towns, was a young population, comradely, courageous, persevering. Oldsters were not yet venturing in numbers to the new province. The climate deterred them, and fear of Indian enmity—a fear shortly to be justified.

The long days of summer were scarcely long enough for all the newcomers must accomplish, and the short days of winter were far too short. In skies clearer than any they had yet known, how sharply the moon and stars glittered above the muck and mud! In air more bracing than any they had yet breathed, how the frosts of winter cracked and rattled the walls of their flimsy dwellings! There were days when a red-hot stove seemed merely to hold a painted fire for all the heat it threw, and then indeed the heart contracted with a sudden fear of the colossal cold. Warm neighbourliness and a sharing of the scarcer comforts, helped many a settler through the first hard year.

"No one needed to be idle in those days," remarks John Kerr, comparing them with the unemployment period of the 1930's. We may well believe that he and his team were kept busy during the remaining months of 1876. At times he was absent from the little home on his longer ventures, but, just before Christmas, he was on hand when Magistrate O'Donnell, who had sworn him in as a special constable in 1873, "swore in" a lusty young stranger to the job of Canadian citizenship. For Magistrate O'Donnell was also Dr. O'Donnell—"a typical family doctor, clever in his profession, always neat and well-appearing, and a friend to all

the community", writes John. John and Mary called their first-born George, in honour of John's father.

When there is wealth of opportunity, rather than of goods and money, there is certain to be something kaleidoscopic in the constant changes of activity. In a chapter dealing with one family over a period of twelve years it may be possible to flash before the eye a few of the swift alternations in colour and pattern of this kaleidoscope of the West.

We have seen that our young photographer had already, since his military discharge in 1871, been identified with surveying, soldiering, policing, hunting, clerking, trading, horse-breaking, and road-clearing. He had rendered service as cook, prison-guard, interpreter, guide, teamster and amanuensis. He had learnt the care of dog-trains, fire-arms, harness, hides, lariats, tents, sleds and snow-shoes; how to load and unload carts, how to build and rebuild fires, how to pound and compound pemmican. Nor has even this list exhausted the occupations he pursued in less than six years, for his story, as already told, failed to mention three short terms of service, during that close-packed year of 1871, in three separate establishments—the bake-shop of one Jack Hackett, and the general stores of John Higgins and Dr. Schultz.

But John's natural bent was towards outdoor activity, and by now he was an experienced traveller on western trails. Moreover, he had become really proficient as a judge of horse-flesh. His services were much in demand for cartage and transportation. He drifted for a time into railroad construction, varied that with a small fling in a manufacturing concern, and enlivened both these jobs with

sundry forms of clerical labour and social activity. Later still, farming attracted him.

Among meagre notes of these days, the following comes to light:

In 1877 I drew nitro-glycerine from St. Boniface (over the river from Winnipeg) to the North-West Angle of the Lake of the Woods, to be taken thence to Fort Frances to be used in the construction of the Fort Frances locks on the Rainy River.

This note is of more than passing interest. For three decades or so, the visitor to Fort Frances was puzzled by a deep cut in the rock on the Canadian side of the fall, which had evidently been made at a heavy cost, and was put to no use whatever. When questions were asked, the reply was usually made: "Oh, it was just an election bid—dating from the Mackenzie administration. It's rather a good place to fish in."

The *Reminiscences of Sir Richard Cartwright* blames Alexander Mackenzie after the Pacific Scandal swept him into power, for his "fatal error" in attempting to combine the office of premier with the charge of a huge department, comprising the present Departments of Transport and Public Works. Apparently the new Premier had pet theories on the subject of waterwys, and a desire to make Canada more independent of routes through United States territory. If the Rainy could have been made navigable clear into Rainy Lake and the various waterways opening therefrom, something would have been gained, though perhaps less than the eye of hope had pictured. Frank Yeigh's compilation *Data on the Rainy River District* (1890) includes the following:

*Fort Frances Locks.*

The works at Fort Frances consist of a canal eight hundred feet in length, cut through solid rock about forty feet wide, with one lift of twenty-four feet eight inches. The chamber of the lock is two hundred feet long and thirty-eight feet wide in the clear. The lowest depth of water on the sills will be five feet six inches, but it is rarely, if ever, known to be so low as that, and is ordinarily from eight to ten feet. The cost of the works to the Dominion Government has been two hundred and fifty thousand dollars.

Not much of this large sum found its way into the pockets of John Kerr; it is safe to say, when, seven years after he witnessed the Feast of the White Dog near the cataract on the Rainy, he transported nitro-glycerine to aid in blasting the rock of the Canadian shore. Whatever may have been the specific effect upon the electorate, it is certain that the next year, 1878, saw the blasting of Mackenzie's career. Some thirty years later, this costly abandoned project was incorporated into the scheme of development now utilized in the pulp industry.

This little excursion into the Department of Canals apparently did not suffice to feed John's ambition, for in the two succeeding years he took a small crack at the Department of Railways. "I also hauled material for construction camps (food supplies mainly) from Winnipeg to the new line being constructed by the Government from Port Arthur to Winnipeg, in 1878 and 1879."

There must have been time off from this rather less perilous cartage job, however, for during those same years John "worked for Sam West, who owned a bottling works

(soft drinks)" in Manitoba's capital. Sam West and John Higgins had been among the jurors in the Lépine trial.

In 1877 John had bought, and paid cash for a small house on Fort Street within two or three doors of the home of Dr. Jackes, and had begun to identify himself with the life of the town as any good citizen should. In the Federal contest of 1878, he was outside scrutineer in the interests of Captain Scott who was elected. "Charlie" Bell acted in the same capacity for Donald A. Smith, and between the two young scrutineers a coolness arose. For four years, commencing with 1879, John was secretary of the Winnipeg Conservative Club, of which Captain Scott was president; and on an occasion when a banquet was tendered to Sir Charles Tupper, John had charge of the music. During this period he gained some experience of another order by keeping the books of the *Winnipeg Daily Times*.

The young city sustained its reputation for worthy entertainments, the appearance in 1879 of de Plainval's operatic company giving a fillip to his old associates. In the early eighties John was on the committee of the first Philharmonic Society of Winnipeg—Rev. Dr. Fortin occupying the chair.

There were genial friends among his neighbours, notably Col. George Ham and his wife. The advent of two brides, Mrs. Robert H. Bryce and Mrs. A. W. Austin, John's sister and niece respectively, both natives of Perth, brought a touch of home to the coming metropolis. Katie, the youngest of the Kerr family, had married a younger brother of the Rev. George Bryce, whose name is closely identified

with the history of religion and education in Winnipeg and throughout the West.

But now the hand of Fate gives this Western kaleidoscope a twist so sharp that it is not possible to detect the flash of colour. The year shifts to 1883, and John and Mary are on a farm in Dakota Territory in what was later the state of Dakota! Their son George is six years old, and his little brother, Jack, is three. The parents' hearts are saddened as they care for the younger boy, who became blind in infancy.

North Dakota and Minnesota in the early days were well-known to Canadians of the Red River district, because the only all-Canadian route to the new province was a trail through the wilds. Farming in these states was no uncommon enterprise, then and later, among western Canadians. Montana had long served as a sort of vestibule to the Bow River district. Few of the older records fail to note the dependence of this Rocky Mountain neighbourhood upon the established forts, the trading-posts, and the water routes of Montana.

John farmed on shares with an American who had two tracts near Larimore and Inkster, and he lived sometimes at one farm, sometimes at the other. At Larimore in 1883, a third son was born, a beautiful, sturdy child, who seemed to have a special claim upon the father's affection. They named him Robert Bryce, after the new brother-in-law in Winnipeg. But some infantile malady carried away this precious baby. He died in his father's arms, was tenderly laid to rest under a tree in the neighbourhood and lived forevermore in their fondest recollections.

In 1884 John's grandfather, Dawson Kerr Sr., died at the old home in Perth in which he had lived for more than

half a century. At ninety he had for some years enjoyed the distinction of great-great-grandfatherhood, and he left a goodly number of descendants. John could not picture Perth without his grandfather as he turned in thought to the East again.

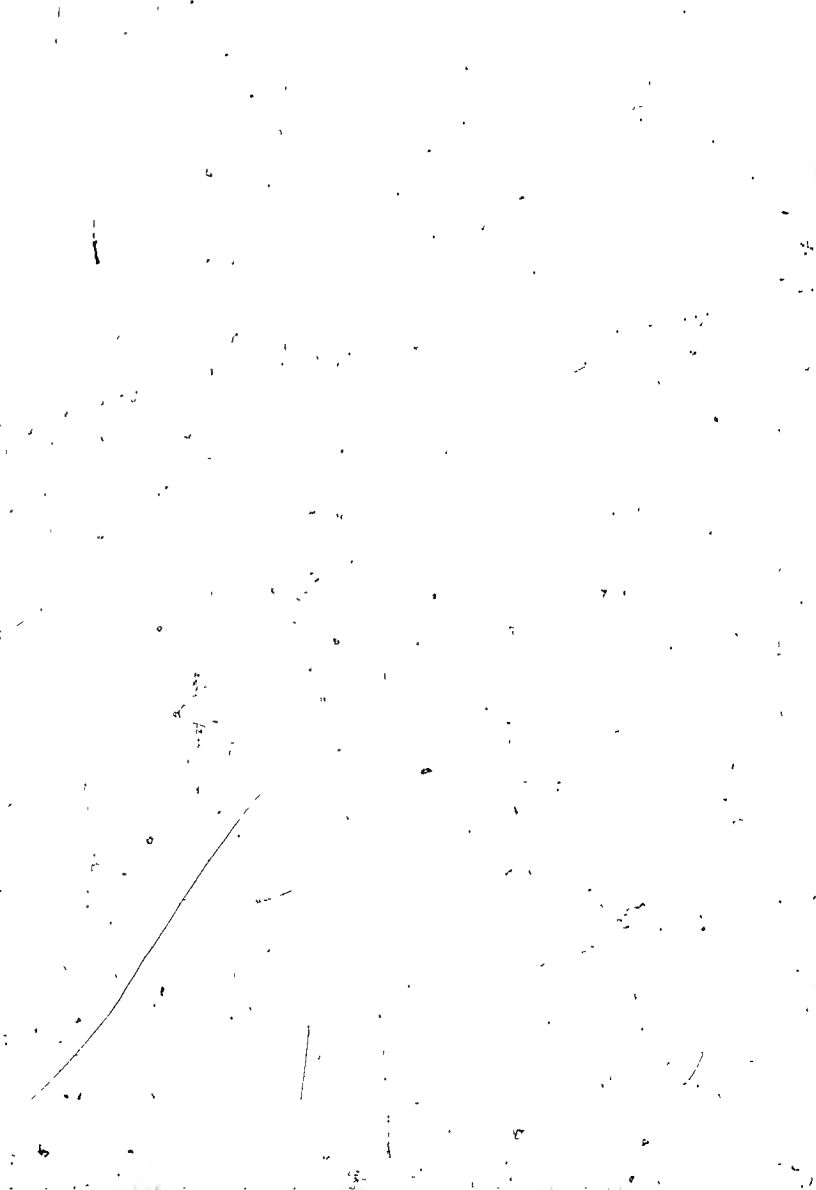
During the following year, all Canadians south of the line were sadly troubled by events in Manitoba and the Territories. Especially perturbed by Gabriel Dumont's part in the rebellion, John hung upon all reports of its progress. The locale of most of the fighting was known to him as well as he knew his native town. Duck Lake, Batoche, Fort Pitt, were not just names to *him*. When the insurrection was put down, and Gabriel made his escape, John prophesied that the authorities would never catch him. "He knew the prairies as a sheep knows its heath, and could go anywhere blindfolded."

The horror and excitement died away, Riel paid the last penalty at Regina, on November 16th, and 1885 slid into the past. At its close, a fourth child, a healthy, dark-eyed boy, whom they named Homer, made his *début* at Inkster and the next year, following an urge felt in both hearts, John and Mary returned to Perth.

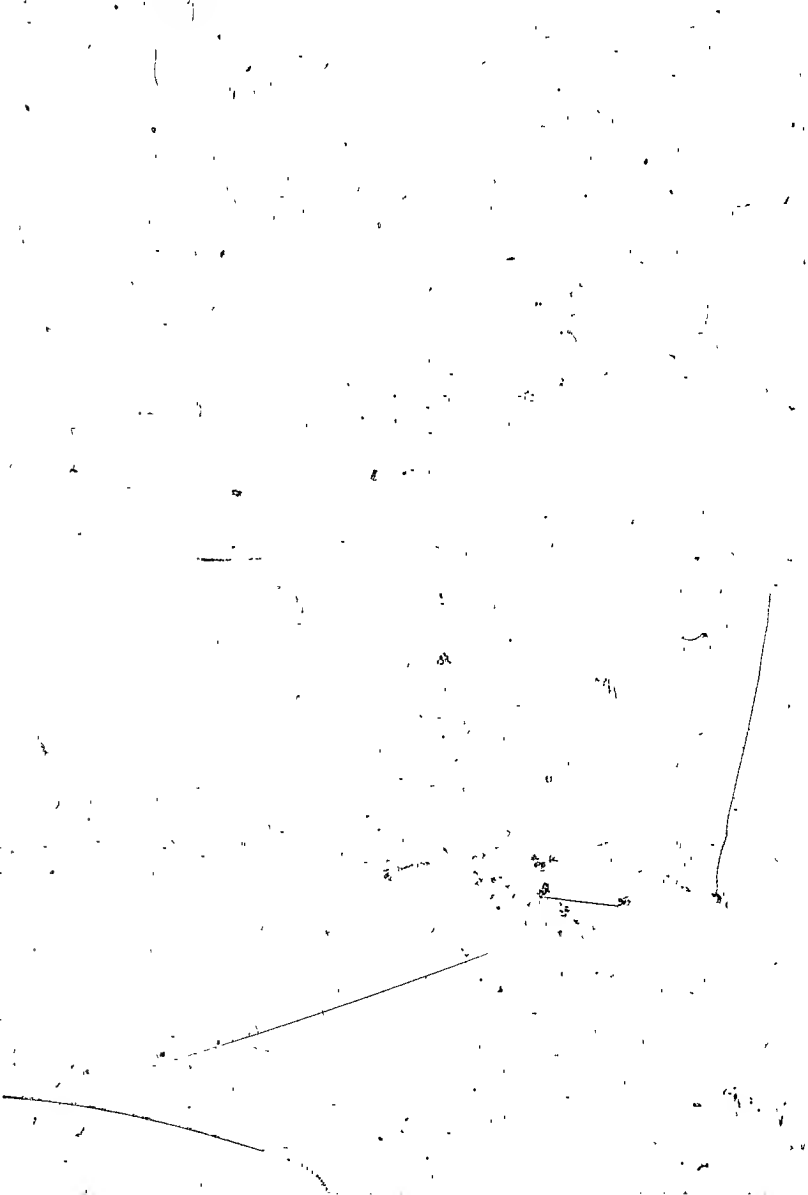
But the pendulum of John's life had only begun to swing in that direction. It still wavered westward—east, west, east, west, east, it swung, before John wrote of 1888, "Home again—and here ever since".

Leaving his family in Perth he went west in each year, working or contracting on railroads in Montana in 1886 and 1887, and operating a threshing outfit in the Canadian West until the "freeze-up" of 1888.





SECTION IV  
THE VETERAN



## CHAPTER XXIX

### "COMPARATIVELY DRAB"

**T**HIS title is not meant as an aspersion upon John's native town. A transition chapter that disposes of forty-two years at a mere glance must take its tone from the total impression. For two years after his return to Perth, John Kerr undertook the management of the Hicks House. Then he became Town Clerk, a position he held into old age. Once asked if he would not care to write an article entitled, "Forty Years as Town Clerk", he replied, "No, for, comparatively speaking, they were *drab* years." No doubt they lacked colour compared with prairie adventures and pioneering.

John's interest in horses never failed. He acted as a judge of horse-flesh at fairs, or at meets—in Barrie, at Ottawa Experimental Farm, and other places. The mere sight of a beautiful horse gave him exquisite pleasure, and the care of his own animals, as well as various inspiring events on the racing schedules, occupied his leisure time. He was a familiar figure at the winter races held at the capital on the frozen Ottawa River, and would depart jubilantly for Perth when his own entries made a good showing.

World affairs, which he always eagerly followed were given a personal tinge when his son George, never a bookish

lad, and quite at home in a scrap, enlisted in the United States Navy about the time of the Spanish-American war. George emerged from this field of action only to enlist in Canada when the South African war broke out. He was among the young hopefuls joining the ranks of Lord Strathcona's Horse, and became batman to the commanding officer, Col. S. B. Steele. Fourteen-year-old Homer hung rapturously on every word and glance of his soldier brother, grudging each occasion that took the older boy's attention during the brief period before the regiment's departure. Col. Steele describes George as "my always active batman, Private Kerr, the son of my old and tried comrade, Jack Kerr, City Clerk of Perth, Ontario".

On the return of Strathcona's Horse to Canada in 1901, Colonel Steele, accompanied by Mrs. Steele, visited his old friend in Perth, and on Saturday, June 1st, according to an enthusiastic report in *The Perth Courier* of June 7th, a banquet was held in the Hicks House at which seventy-five of the leading citizens of the town gathered to acclaim him. To the toast in his honour, the Colonel made a capital reply, bespeaking no credit for himself, but stressing the important service his men had rendered as scouts for the regiments to which they had been attached. A certain glamour had hung about Lord Strathcona's Horse, and the good people of Perth were lavish with their praise. John's own contribution to the programme was a song.

During the next week, Colonel Steele returned to the scene of operations to take over a command in the South African Constabulary. As George again accompanied him, John Kerr was able to enjoy vicariously through his son's adventures a few of the thrills of a soldier's lot. Especially

amused was he at the story afterwards told by Col. Steele in his book, *Forty Years in Canada*, concerning George's encounter, at Las Palmas where their ship was coaling, with a number of stokers. "I was within a few feet of my batman," so runs the account, "when he made his report, and saw the ten stokers come up the companionway. As the batman related his story of the assault, one of them called him a liar, whereupon he threw himself fiercely upon the crowd and thrashed them soundly, throwing them to the orlop deck, while the captain, a lively Irishman and fond of a fight, looked on with keen enjoyment."

The death of John's father in 1889 was the first break in their large family. In 1900, just as she entered her ninetieth year, Catharine Kerr followed her husband. In 1902, Mary Kerr, an invalid for many years, was released from her sufferings, and a year later her son Jack also died.

John came into possession of Tara Cottage, his boyhood home, not long after his mother's death. Life jogged along in this new-old environment. George returned from the wars, and directed his activity into civilian pursuits. Homer grew to manhood. After several years as a widower, their father married Mrs. Maud Chamberlin. His work in the interests of his native town, his various concerns and occupations went on as before. When World War I broke out, it was Homer's turn to serve. He held a commission as a lieutenant in the R.C.A.S.C.

In the midst of the struggle (1916), when driving, John met with an accident that nearly cost him his life, and left him a cripple at the age of sixty-five for the remainder of his days. He finally returned to his office; driven there daily by his faithful wife, but his injuries were

so extensive that it was impossible for him to regain more than a fraction of his former strength and agility. However, if his body ached—and it persistently did—his brain functioned as clearly as ever, and from now on memory began to play a major role in his mental life.

The war had barely concluded when Sir S. B. Steele died in London, England. It was not very long since his last letter had arrived, and John, opening his copy of *Forty Years in Canada*, re-read with mingled pleasure and sadness the inscription, "To my old and tried comrade, John A. Kerr—S. B. Steele, Winnipeg, 18th April, 1915." He recalled with pride the fact that, on request, he had furnished a little material for this book, in the appraisal of Gabriel Dumont's character, and the descriptions of plains life and the hunt. The accuracy and adequacy of the work also appealed to him. In notes that he made of the Elzéar Goulet affair of 1870, he has this to say:

This is the story as told me by a comrade whom I had every reason to believe; a particular friend of mine from the day he was transferred from Number 4 Company to ours, Number 7, as corporal, till the day of his death—General Sir Sam B. Steele, and I take his word before that of any other man I knew either inside or outside the fort.

In John's view, if one outlived his fellow-veterans, he should accept in a fair spirit the penalties of longevity, along with its privileges. But a most unexpected blow was dealt him in October 1929, when his handsome son Homer, who had seldom lived in Canada after reaching man's estate, died in Sydney, New South Wales. George, with his wife and family, made his home in Perth, a circumstance that helped to soften this bereavement.

One cheerful April afternoon of 1930, John lowered himself into a chair before his writing table, and set his stout stick within easy reach. He sometimes derived a dour sort of amusement from his mode of locomotion, but to-day he was preoccupied. The scene from the window and all his surroundings had changed little in the sixty years which had elapsed since that other April afternoon when he had stood in that very room under the eye of his father, and the subject of his trip to Red River had been broached. What a burning question it had seemed at the time! How vastly different the out-look of the volunteer from the in-look of the veteran! Scarred not by battles, but by the years, mused John, reaching for the sheets of an unfinished letter. It was addressed to a younger relative, in the retrospective mood called forth by this anniversary. He re-read his last paragraph:

- It is hardly credible, my dear, that where in 1872-5 we hunted buffalo over plains that contained not one single habitation, there are now such cities as Regina, Calgary, Moose Jaw, Saskatoon. That for months in 1872-3, I never saw a single white man, only *Métis* plains hunters and Indians, and that here I am, fifty-eight years afterwards, telling you the story. I doubt very much if any of my old friends, the French *Métis* of the St. Laurent Mission, still survive in this year of Our Lord.

John smiled thoughtfully as he took up his pen and added:

"Time, like an ever-rolling stream,  
Bears all its sons away."





Time had not yet begun to weigh heavily on his hands, when new prospects opened before him. His talent as a raconteur was called forth by two friends who spent many evenings with him, and invariably brought the conversation around to life on the plains during the '70's; and John's experiences in the West. One of these visitors was W. A. McLean, formerly Deputy Minister of Highways for Ontario; the other was T. Arthur Rogers, barrister, then Mayor of Perth. These two were frequently joined by some third listener, a town official or professional man, or a caller from out-of-town.

According to Mr. McLean, they were all greatly impressed by John's ability as a story-teller, and by the worth of his stories. "They were accurate in fact, historically valuable, and a mine of local detail. They had a wealth of colour pertaining to conditions which have rapidly passed into history, and the light they threw on the character of the Indians and *Métis* should prove invaluable." So wrote Mr. McLean. "You should put your experiences into print," these friends told John, and he got down to work.

The first stories that appeared embodied his earliest recollections, and were followed by historical articles, travel-tales, stories of buffalo-hunting, and life on the plains.

As an aside, and strictly on his own initiative, John tried his hand at fiction. His best effort was a short story inspired by a good racing yarn in a current magazine. He ingeniously upset the plot at a certain point by a manoeuvre which turned the losing horse into the winner, thereby also reversing fate for the human element in the tale! His knowledge of horse-flesh and racing made this alteration quite convincing. For an octogenarian, he was no mean

plotter, did not tangle himself up in the web of a story and professed an evergreen interest in love-affairs. *The Perth Courier* published some of his fiction in serial form.

A pen that is seldom idle can turn out quantities of copy. But much of John's work was written with no thought whatever of publication—a series of articles on old songs, another on favourite hymns, a small collection of dog stories, childhood tales, meditations with a religious cast. He delighted in dressing up the family records: finding two locks of hair belonging to his mother and her sister (Catharine and Sarah Corry) he wrote up the occasion of their exchanging these tokens, and sent the story to his aunt's grandson, D'Alton Corry Coleman of the C.P.R. Hearing over the radio the long-since familiar beat of the tom-tom—it was during the Royal tour in the West in 1939, and therefore not long before his death—he recorded a series of occasions on which the tom-tom had impressed him in his youth.

Not including work that was published locally—and it may be said that he had always had a tendency to break into print in reminiscent or critical mood—his output appeared in *The Canadian Magazine*, *The New Outlook*, *The Canadian Motorist*, the *Winnipeg Tribune Magazine Section*, and *The Dalhousie Review*.

But John's personal history has been outrun by this account of his writing ventures. Less than a year after his work began to make the wider markets, in August 1933, he lost his wife. It had never occurred to him that Maud, much his junior, vigorous and lively, could predecease him; and deprived of her help and encouragement he felt lost

indeed. He was now alone, so it was decided that thenceforth he would live with his son George, whose family gave him a kindly welcome.

Tara Cottage now passed into other hands. It had been occupied by the Kerr family for seven or eight decades, and a removal of all accumulations was bound to unearth something of interest. A "find" was made of some cases or strongboxes which had been the property of John's father, and proved to contain hundreds of letters and documents, dating back to the 1850's and even earlier. The vast bulk of them were family letters written to George Kerr by his widely-scattered descendants; but there were also ancient bill-heads, ledgers, accounts, memoranda. There were one or two short letters from Sir Richard Cartwright, two or three from Governor Alexander Morris, and others who were in the public eye of long ago.

Some of the old accounts, with their lists of homely pioneer necessities, seemed fit exhibits for the local museum. Billheads of the *Perth Expositor*, dating back nearly seventy years, evoked the following from the *Expositor* of 1933: "These Billheads are a masterpiece, resplendent with fancy borders and extremely attractive type. The paper used at that time was what is known as 'laid' instead of 'woven', and is as tough as bond paper of to-day."

This "find" had the effect of knitting together into a far more enduring fabric all John's hitherto disconnected impressions of his father's life and character. For some weeks his mind played continually on the subject, and the picture he drew is worth reproducing, if only as a glimpse of the endless activity of our pioneers.

The immense loads he carried! He was at different times Crown Lands agent, town councillor, auditor, assignee, assessor, school trustee, member of the Board of Health, census commissioner, justice of the peace, secretary of this and that, including the Bible Society. He went into lumbering, road-building, the potash business, the produce business, the hides-and-tallow business, pork-packing—while all the time he was engaged in general store-keeping. He bought and sold bank stocks; owned, leased, and operated sawmills; worked as an insurance agent; and made land deals innumerable—in fact was land-crazy. Lawsuits weighed on him. But, most of all, *everyone borrowed from him*. I look at his picture which hangs near my bed, and say, "Poor old Dad! No wonder your hair turned grey early in life!"

The next three years, 1934-6, were the busiest years in John's life as a writer. During 1934 his buffalo-hunting tales appeared in serial form. His health improved slightly, and he was able to attend a Board of Trade dinner, and to make a short speech during the evening. The death, in Perth, in 1935, of his sister Eliza, in her ninety-fifth year, promoted him to be the head of the family, but it was not until the middle of 1936 that he began to dwell upon the subject of his age. "I am old," he wrote in August of that year. "Eighty-five is a good old age. My physical being tells me so, though I'm not senile in the ordinary understanding of the term."

Two occurrences in late August of 1936 brought forth the remark quoted. One was the diamond jubilee of the treaties at Forts Carlton and Pitt, including the ceremony at Carlton during which Lord Tweedsmuir and Premier

King were made Indian chiefs. The fact that he was the only living being whose name appeared upon the original treaty paper, gave John a ghost-like feeling. And the death a few days later of Dr. C. N. Bell of Winnipeg, whom he had not seen for forty-eight years, heightened this impression. "Just got word that my old companion, Charlie Bell, has gone. I wrote him no longer ago than Thursday last—and he wouldn't get the letter! And so another of the old boys of 1870 has passed over."

Towards the close of that same year, a fact was brought home to John, which he had for months endeavoured to discount. George, who turned sixty at Christmas time, had evidently not long to live. He died in January 1937. The old man, who was now childless, came to depend more and more upon the ministrations of his daughter-in-law and his three granddaughters, who were kindness itself to him. In the next year, 1938, his younger brother, "little Charlie", who had never married, died in Calgary, in the mid-eighties. Now there were only two of the family remaining—John and his much-loved youngest sister.

The advancing years began to tell on John. He bore up bravely, writing when he felt able, and, when bed-ridden, deriving what pleasure he could from the radio, sometimes joining in the old songs himself to while away the time. The coming of milder weather was a boon to him, and July 1938 found him, a spare but determined figure, at the orderly table in his pleasant sitting-room where sunshine lit up some fine old prints of Fort Garry. His most cherished volumes were always near at hand.

Throughout the summer of 1939, his mind kept reverting to his earliest childhood, but later in the year after the

first shock of the onset of war had subsided, he gathered himself together for a special attack on two subjects—the Manitoba Constabulary under de Plainval, and (more particularly) the historical significance of Lépine's apprehension. In the latter case he was aided by a bound book of the evidence at Lépine's trial, kindly lent him by his mother's grand-nephew, D. C. Coleman.

Without applying to John so hackneyed a term as "prince of letter-writers", it may be said that the letter was his true medium of expression. There is nothing of the royal about a born letter-writer. In John's case, the essence of pure camaraderie flowed through his pen-point and flooded from the paper into the spirit of his correspondent. He never pressed a point unduly. You could take him or leave him. His own opinion: "The daily life—that's what makes a good letter."

And so, from his letters, quaint, familiar and easy, it is possible to trace his personality, and to witness some of the workings of his memory, remarkable for its scope and precision.

*Temperament:* Some of John's characteristics irked him. He was bothered by two conflicting sides. "I seem a kaleidoscopic sort of person, don't I?" Occasionally one of his sides took the other to task. "Let theology alone, John Andrew, buffalo-hunting was more in your line."

"I'm always either putting my foot in it, or pulling it out again," he complained once, "but if I do say it, I made few real enemies in either sex." Of the "Kerr temper"—a phrase well-known in the family—he considered himself to have a heaping share. "That Kerr temper," he wrote, "crops out even unto the third and fourth generations. Mine has

somewhat, shall I say, mellowed? I suppose it was the Irish in us that made us go about with chips on our shoulders, but we were all too fond of our own way. Nothing meek nor mild about us—too, too quick in the uptake.”

A great deal of what he said was true, but the Kert temper had its converse side of tenderness. “Overlook my lapses into the lachrymose. As an Irishman I’m entitled to a lot of latitude.” And again, “Don’t advise me to be hard-boiled. Let me tell you, you’ve got a sentimental old fool of an uncle.”

However, through the long years, he developed a sane philosophy. “If X lives to my age, he will mellow. *Bitterness doesn’t pay*, as I’ve found out.”

“I wouldn’t give a brass farthing to know what lay behind anything in my past life. ‘Life is but a winter’s day, a journey to the tomb.’ While I don’t agree with this (there’s a summer for every winter) yet, after all, it *is* a journey to the tomb—so why worry about the past which cannot be changed?”

He could “rag” quite charmingly on occasion: “You say your letter was simply an interlude between plum jam and crab jelly—a pretty fine interlude, but if I were there I’d enjoy some of those outerludes, crab jelly for preference.” “Add to a furnace that balks, a sewer that doesn’t sew, and your cup of misery must have overflowed.”

*Memory:* The claim is often made by oldsters that they recollect the distant past, while all events of recent date become blurred. This denotes a certain lack of focus, which distorts even those images that seem to stand out clearly. John’s memory was unbroken, and accurate to a remarkable degree. “I am enclosing,” he once said, “some drafts



of unfinished work of several years ago, just to show that they don't differ from my recent accounts of the same events. I came across these this morning." (They tallied in every particular.)

It is not strange that dozens of passages in his letters deal with memory. As time went on, it seemed that his memory went back further and further, garnering fresh incidents. "I put down my pen and sit—thinking and thinking—and then older incidents crowd in upon me from my early home life. . . ."

Especially intrigued was he by the clear images that formed in the night. This was a common experience. "Pouf! Away they fly when I'm confronted by pen and paper. At night I'm ambitious, morning finds me apathetic."

But in the main he noted, "When memory starts working, it doesn't know when to stop."

*Accuracy:* It is hard for people with clear recollections and orderly minds to exhibit patience when others of shaky mental equipment rush into print without taking the trouble to verify their "facts". The appalling stuff that has frequently masqueraded as Canadian history—sometimes even in bound books—aroused the Kerr temper on numerous occasions. John well knew that a slip here and there was inevitable; he knew that typographical errors occurred, and that editors sometimes took liberties with one's script—as when the wording of one of his own articles was altered to make a "hanging" instead of a "shooting" for Thomas Scott, and to reverse the current of the Rainy River. But when historical facts were mangled right and left, when, on the face of things, nothing tallied,

it produced the impression that, lacking interested guardians, Canadian history need not be treated with respect. The outrageous articles that marked the golden jubilee of the 1885 rebellion, even in some of the largest dailies! The sad mix-ups as to Fenian raids! The writers who insisted that the Duke of Connaught had served in the Wolseley expedition! Obituaries that made out their subjects to have been in two places at the same time, or decorated for engagements that took place in their infancy—or never took place at all! Characters that travelled on railroads not yet built, or encountered the “Mounties” before that body was formed, or killed buffalo long after their extinction—all these naturally roused John’s ire. Sometimes he exclaimed, “What’s the use?” and ignored them. But generally, he stood to his guns, and the resulting shots seldom failed to score a bull’s-eye in the pages of some publication.

A noted Ottawa columnist brought Riel over from Montana in 1885, lugging Big Bear, “a Sioux chief”, along with him! Big Bear left a “trail of burnings all the way from the border”. He was hanged along with twenty-two other Indians “simultaneously in the prison-yard at Regina”. The columnist added, “*I think I am correct in saying* Riel’s execution was not specifically for treason, but for having brought over from Montana the Sioux chief and his blood-thirsty war party”.

John felt obliged to interfere. He wrote to say that Big Bear was a Saskatchewan Cree chief, that he had always lived at Fort Pitt, that he had not been in Montana, that he left no “trail of burnings”, that he was not hanged, that only eight Indians went to the gallows, and that they were hanged in Battleford, not Regina; that Louis Riel came

over from Montana in *June 1884*, unaccompanied by anyone but his family and the deputation of four *Métis*—including Gabriel Dumont—which had gone to fetch him, armed with cordial messages from *Père André*.

A good-sized pamphlet could easily have been made of John's collected criticisms. In most cases the facts were perfectly accessible to anyone dealing with the subjects under consideration. "In 1874," said a certain obituary, "Mr. X. went to Winnipeg, and soon became interested in politics; during the Riel rebellion he was given powers of a sheriff, and arrested one of the men who shot Captain Scott." "Permit me to say," objected John, "(1) that the late Mr. X. was never given the powers of a sheriff during the Riel rebellion—which occurred in 1869-70, (2) that neither he nor anyone else ever arrested one of the men who shot Captain Scott, (3) that the man who was shot was Thomas Scott, not Captain Scott, (4) that the man who was arrested for complicity in the murder of Thomas Scott was arrested in 1873, three years after the rebellion, (5) that Mr. X. had no hand whatever in the arrest of Ambroise Lépine, the only man tried for Scott's murder, whose trial began in 1873, one year before Mr. X. is reported to have gone to Winnipeg. . . . With these few alterations the rest of the sentence may possibly be correct."

*Religion:* "All my long life I've been so susceptible to music, especially sacred music." "I want to hear a sermon, but more especially hymns." From rhapsodies on oratorios, requiems, sacred cantatas, male voices, it is easy to deduce that music and religion went hand in hand in John Andrew's soul. Radio vocal music often had to suffice for him. Sometimes it soothed, sometimes it distressed him.

"The air is submerged. Voices that should be subordinated are loud and aggressive; they should be only complementary to the air of the song." He wrote this in his last summer of life.

John's faith was simple, instant, and unwavering. As to a future state he retained ideas inculcated in his youth. Had he lived in Ireland, he might have believed in fairies. As it was, angels were quite real to him. Most believers take angels in their stride, but do not count upon nor consort with them. John had unbounded faith in the potentialities of the human race under Divine guidance. A race that had produced radio and was developing television, he felt confident would ultimately contrive to hear the angels sing. Why not? he argued. There was no hard and fast line of division between natural and supernatural. In fact he challenged the term "supernatural", instancing the commonplaces of to-day which, but yesterday, were rated impossibilities. All things were possible. "That glorious song of old" would reach human ears in the end. He denied being visionary. "I believe in miracles," he declared earnestly, attaching a new meaning to the word.

John's angels were inevitably vocal. "I wish with all my heart they'd speak or sing right away quick to that man Hitler—don't you?" This was in 1934. Incidentally, long before Hitler was generally considered a menace, he appeared in John's letters as "that man Hitler—I wouldn't trust him out of my sight!"

While he was of a sanguine disposition, and sure that "somehow good" was the final goal, there were times when the immediate future discouraged the old man—and no wonder! In November 1935 he wrote: "What a long,

long road to the millennium at our present rate of travel. A long, long road!"

*Politics and historical sense:* In July 1930 John wrote, "received the magazine with your article on McGee. D'Arcy McGee was no man's tool. He had a mind of his own. A lot of pigmies are in the shoes of McGee, Tupper and Macdonald, but I'm hoping July 28th will see the last of them."

It is unnecessary to add that four letters spelled John's political status. He was no Conservative, TORY was the term. The elections of October 1935 were "a terrible setback. Bennett is head and shoulders above any other man in Canada. I don't expect to see another election." He died a month before March, 1940.

John was one of the old-line Tories, who, aware that "Sir John A." was not wholly admirable, yet found him irresistible. From "The Chieftain's" letters he was forever producing some triumph of shrewd insight or statecraft. Yet he honestly admired some of the leading Liberals; spoke, in 1934, of Chief Justice Sir William Mulock's address to the Bar Association of Ontario, as "touching one's best feelings".

As far back as 1932 he had his eye on the danger spot, Germany. Some of his observations on that country and on Italy, the Suez Canal, Spain, unemployment, the "depression", re-armament were, for an octogenarian, acute and far-sighted.

Naturally, John dwelt chiefly upon Canadian subjects of the period of which he wrote. He found in R. G. MacBeth a writer who exactly expressed his own views on the *Métis*, namely: "Through the action of a limited num-

ber of them, many people think of the name 'half-breed' only in connection with Western rebellions, whereas the real history shows that the presence of men with Indian blood in their veins has been a most important factor in the peaceful making of the West into a part of Canada." They had real grievances, John was ever ready to admit. Gabriel Dumont possessed the makings of a good Canadian. John hotly denied a statement that Gabriel had been "thick" with Riel before the first uprising. Never in all his association with Gabriel had he once heard him mention Riel's name.

"Sometimes Dumont was intemperate, occasionally violent, but the genuine kindness he showed me when I was little more than a boy," said John, "drew me to him. A quality hard to describe, fascinated me. He used a queer trick that has been traced back to older generations of plains hunters—he could call the buffalo in some mysterious manner. Possibly he used some mesmerism on me, as well!" But, to the solitary young Canadian, all the plains hunters were kind and generous. "Their memory lives fresh and green in the heart of *le Petit Canada* to this day."

Turning to Lépine, John argued that his loss of political rights need not have wrecked all his aspirations for the good of his fellowmen, and sent him forever into the background. If he "had had it in him" no rebuff that he received could have held him back from that future of accomplishment for which his partisans claim that he was mentally and morally designed.

The treatment he received was actually far beyond his deserts. Others with ability have risen above circumstances

more galling than any that confronted Lépine. He was crudely self-important, his habits intemperate, his language anything but refined; his mind did not lend itself to culture. As to leadership in statecraft, in my opinion, he had none.

Riel used Lépine to bring about his own ends—casting him as Jorkins to his own Spenlow. All stern decrees were laid, by Riel, at the door of Lépine's determination. When Riel shed crocodile tears, Lépine shook his massive head. Riel planned; Lépine achieved. It was Lépine who supervised the laying of barriers in the path of McDougall's entry to office, who incited the settlers to violence, who presided at the so-called court-martial that condemned Scott, who dropped the handkerchief that sped the bullets on their way, who would not yield up Scott's body for burial. But the mainspring of all these actions was Riel.

"Ambroise Lépine, in seeking obscurity, merely returned to a status from which he would never have issued had he not possessed a certain misleading quality—an air of command without a sufficient underpinning of ability to support it." Such was the final sentence in a painstaking study of Lépine.

As a rule, it was among the more important of the full-blooded Indians that John found individuals who were tricky or despicable. He frequently spoke of the generosity of the common Indian. When trading, he would walk into their tents, "and never was I refused the best they had".

"Did you know," John asked in 1938, "that Erastus Wiman wrote to Sir John A. in February 1886, suggesting that Poundmaker be 'loaned' to the Wild West Show 'on

condition that he was treated well and returned in good order'?" Poundmaker was in durance vile, and Wiman surmised "it might be a relief" to Sir John. Sitting Bull had been "rendered innocuous" by this method. "I am reminded," John added, "that lately I had some correspondence with William Perkins Bull, about Sitting Bull and the Sioux Indians."

John's collection of clippings—for the most part recollections of Old-Timers, or data on Indian treaties, the rebellions, and the growth of the West—was gradually enlarged by obituaries of his ancient "buddies", for, by the end of 1939, the ranks of the "old boys" had almost dwindled away.

*Literary Efforts:* *Le Petit Canada* broke to saddle his writing-hobby, just as he broke to saddle many a steed on the western plains. And in so doing he acquired concerning his output a sort of horse-sense—a term he would certainly have considered complimentary. In the beginning he had to wrestle with a tendency to long-windedness. "I must confess to an inability to put what I want to say in the fewest possible words. I resemble Mackenzie King in that respect." "Tautology! Why, of course, but we might as well be tautological as anything else. Anyway a lot of leeway is allowable in persons past the four-score mark."

He learned to hurdle over disappointments, and to take an occasional fall, his favourite slogan being "I won't lose any sleep over it." Apropos of a rejection: "Though sugar-coated, the pill was there." Observation on the belated use of a contribution: "It makes me appear ridiculous—like a Rip Van Winkle after a five-months' snooze." Concerning an acceptance: "Well, we aren't dead yet."



He was uniformly modest as to his efforts. "The mountain laboured and brought forth a mouse—and a tiny wee squeaker at that. I hand him over to be raised or put to a painless death." And, a year later, "Sell this or embalm it, as seems best."

Among his letters were several from writers of occasional articles on Canadian subjects, as well as appeals from Fred Williams and other journalists, notes from authorities of the R.C.M.P., and one or two letters from the author, Morris Longstreth.

He had a number of fans, some young, some old, some recalling yet other figures in the tapestry of the seventies. Among them were strangers and old acquaintances. Several of them were widows. "You know I was always partial to them!" One of these, an old flame, of whom John had not heard for nearly sixty years, broke into verse in his honour. Part of her racy production closes this retrospect of John Andrew's nine years as a writer. She has now probably crossed the Divide. If not, she will pardon this use of her rhymes. They are signed only with her initials.

To J.A.K. on his 85th Birthday.

(May he make it a hundred, hopes L.D.E.) /

You certainly led an adventurous life  
(I've been reading your tales of the West)  
What with buffalo hunting, and skinning, and such,  
You held up your end with the best—  
Of the "breeds" and the Indians. Played all their games,  
Bet on their ponies, and won all their dames;  
Then handed them back—(not over polite)—  
For this trifling fault—their skins were not white.

I'm surprised at you, Jack, because, don't you know,  
In the days I remember, *you never were slow!*

Still, reading your sketches of those Good Old Days,  
And granting your prowess a big lump of praise,  
There's one thing that sticks in my crop like a *burr*,  
And lends to your saga a terrible slur—

I know not *one* adage will serve to explain

The problem that's playing Sam Hill with my brain,  
It's this: Where *did* you, well reared (and good-looking!)

*Get the stomach to swallow an Indian's cooking?*

LORD TWEEDSMUIR SENDS A GREETING  
(*Ave Atque Vale!*)

JOHN KERR'S hand grew ever more shaky. "You'll have your work cut out to decipher this. My hand, like the wind, goeth where it listeth. . . . Between you and me, I don't care how soon the scythe-bearer garners me in."

John was not lamenting—far from it. The passing years had brought home to him the dignity and benignity of death.

Some time ago, in a Toronto paper, I read a letter by a man who lived in St. Thomas, Ontario, relating his experience as a prisoner of Riel's in Fort Garry, in December 1869. He wound up in these words. "As far as I know, all the other prisoners of that time have crossed the River Jordan, and I am sitting on the bank waiting for the ferry." I might make the same statement with regard to almost every character that enters these reminiscences. They have "crossed Jordan". They have "joined the multitude on the other side", while I still stand on the shore. Once I swam the South Saskatchewan to bring the old scow across to my *Métis* companions. I'm no more afraid of Jordan than I was of the prairie river, but now I'm content to wait for the Ferryman. He will find an unreluctant passenger. . . ."

The weight of years is in itself a burden. "Strange," remarked John, "that the young get the idea that the old

don't feel, don't suffer, as they do. I know how I thought so when young; but now that I'm old I know better. I know that the old feel far more acutely than the young."

These preliminary comments are not meant to indicate that John Kerr faced 1940 in a weak or apprehensive spirit. To him, as to all the rest of the world, the new year brought anxious speculation about the course of the war. Like everyone else he carried on with his immediate labours. During January he forwarded five or six vigorous letters on the subjects uppermost at that time.

The old man had always admired Lord Tweedsmuir, Canada's hard-working Governor-General, who forgot his frail health to dare Arctic travel, let no opportunity for doing good escape him, and yet found time to record his impressions in beautiful language. Back in November 1935, John wrote, "Well, we've an author for our Governor-General. I've read some of his works and found them good." Two months later he announced, "K. sent me one of Buchan's books for a birthday gift—*Huntingtower*. I read it years ago, had it on my shelves, but someone made love to it and wooed it away. It's good, I'll gladly re-read it."

John expected to enter his ninetieth year on January 24th. It seemed unlikely that he would live to see another birthday. Might not the Governor-General, if the old man's record lay before him, send a short message of greeting? Especially if John's part in the Indian treaties at Forts Carlton and Pitt were brought to his notice? This question was put to the test.

There was no need to doubt Lord Tweedsmuir's benevolence, which far outdid anything that had been expected

of him. He anticipated John's anniversary by two days, and the recipient himself records the magical effect of that greeting.

Perth, January 22nd, 1940.

... Open your eyes wide, wide. This morning I received a letter with *Government House* engraved on it. I found it was a birthday greeting with reference to my reminiscences, and to my being a link with the past. I looked at the signature at the bottom, could not believe my eyes, but there it was—"Tweedsmuir".

So ran this joyful letter, the last that John was ever to write. It was enclosed in an envelope, addressed, stamped, and left upon his study table; and in the confusion of the next two days it was overlooked. Confusion? Yes, because a chain of strange coincidences followed the penning of that letter. On the morning of the 23rd, the day preceding his birthday, John arose from the breakfast table, reached for a doorknob on which he was accustomed to lean as he hobbled from one room to another, missed it, and fell heavily, fracturing his hip.

He spent his birthday in hospital, chiefly under opiates. Cards, telegrams, flowers, messages, went unnoticed. For some days, the question of his recovery hung in the balance, but, as his strength failed, it was deemed only courteous to acquaint Lord Tweedsmuir of this mishap, quoting from the veteran's last letter in lieu of an acknowledgment. Posted on February 1st, this message reached Ottawa only a few days before the fall of February 6th, that proved fatal to the Governor-General.

John's age was against his recovery. Years before, he had written, "My back ailment is chronic. I'll have it to the end." X-rays that showed the fracture of his hip also revealed an old crack in the spine, undoubtedly caused by his foolhardy dive from the bridge in '73, when he worked with Gabriel Dumont's half-breeds building the road to Green Lake.

Just before midnight on February 8th, John died. During his last day of active life he had caused a dozen typed copies and four photographic prints to be made of the prized letter from Lord Tweedsmuir. It read:

GOVERNMENT HOUSE

OTTAWA

18th January, 1940..

John Andrew Kerr, Esq.,  
Perth,  
Ont.

Dear Mr. Kerr,

I am venturing to send you a line of birthday greetings, for I understand that on the 24th of this month you attain the age of eighty-nine. You must have the most wonderful record of any man living in Canada, for you are a link with very old history. It is wonderful to think that you were in the first Riel rebellion. I only wish I could have a chance of a talk with you.

I am delighted to hear that you are preparing your reminiscences, for they ought to make a fascinating book.

With every good wish,

Yours very sincerely,

Tweedsmuir.

Strange indeed it was to see John Andrew lying white and rigid among banks of flowers, he whose fresh colouring had never faded, whose inborn activity had never been wholly curbed by his misfortunes. His funeral took place on the afternoon of Sunday, February 11th, when the blazing white-and-gold-and-blue of a perfect Canadian winter day was at its height. The sun had hardly sunk over the snowy fields of Lanark County, when the news came: "Lord Tweedsmuir has passed away."

This simple instance of Lord Tweedsmuir's kindness made a deep impression at the time, and grateful hearts have not forgotten it. It was a gesture—Hail and Farewell!—towards John, from another "John", a generation younger, born across the sea in that other Perth, from which John Kerr's native town had derived its name.

A contributor to the *Perth Courier*, also a student of western annals, Donald McNicol, of Roselle Park, New Jersey, wrote an estimate of John, which was published late in 1937. It furnishes a fitting conclusion to this biography:

No pilgrim on this rolling globe should expect more from life than came to John Andrew Kerr: an adventurous life in youth, a long life, a clear memory, and a sane philosophy.

What we know about early times is that passed on to us by the articulate. What the inarticulate experienced, no matter how glamorous, is lost to posterity. John Kerr is one of the few articulate pioneers. His memoirs present facts stranger than fiction. My respects to him!

THE END

